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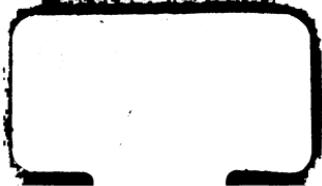
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THE
GREAT MYTH

JOHN C. WRIGHT



FEB 7. 1923

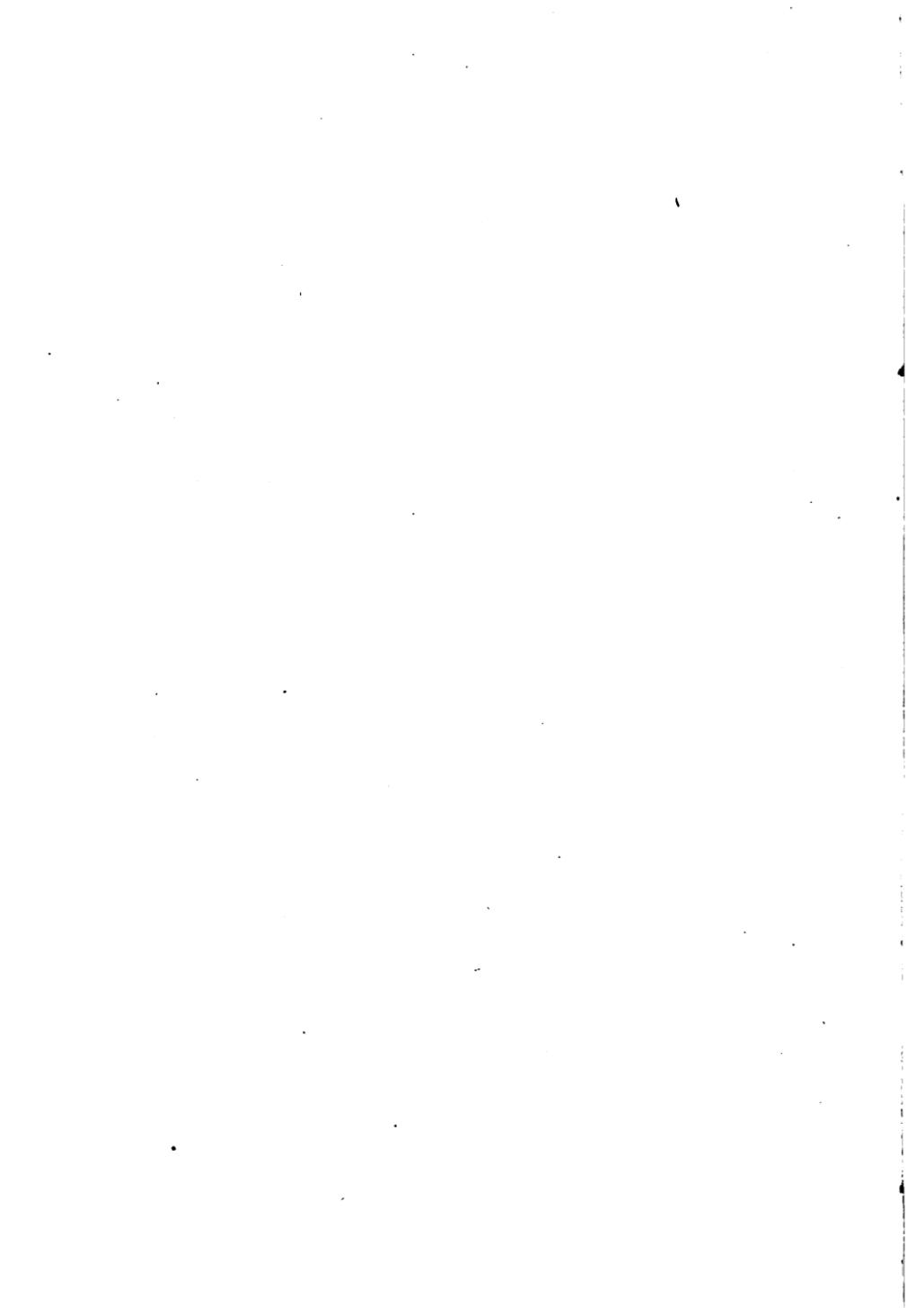
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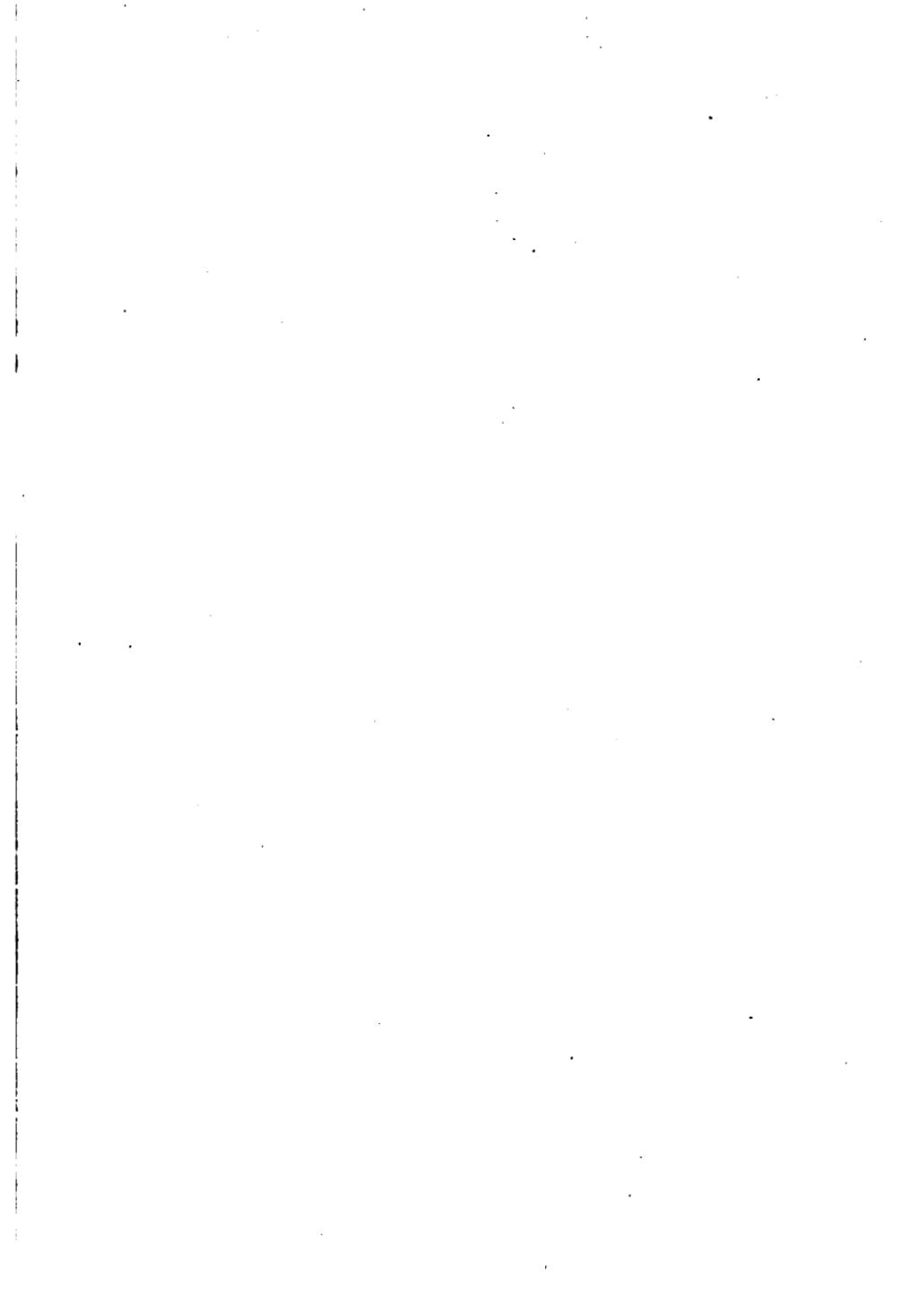
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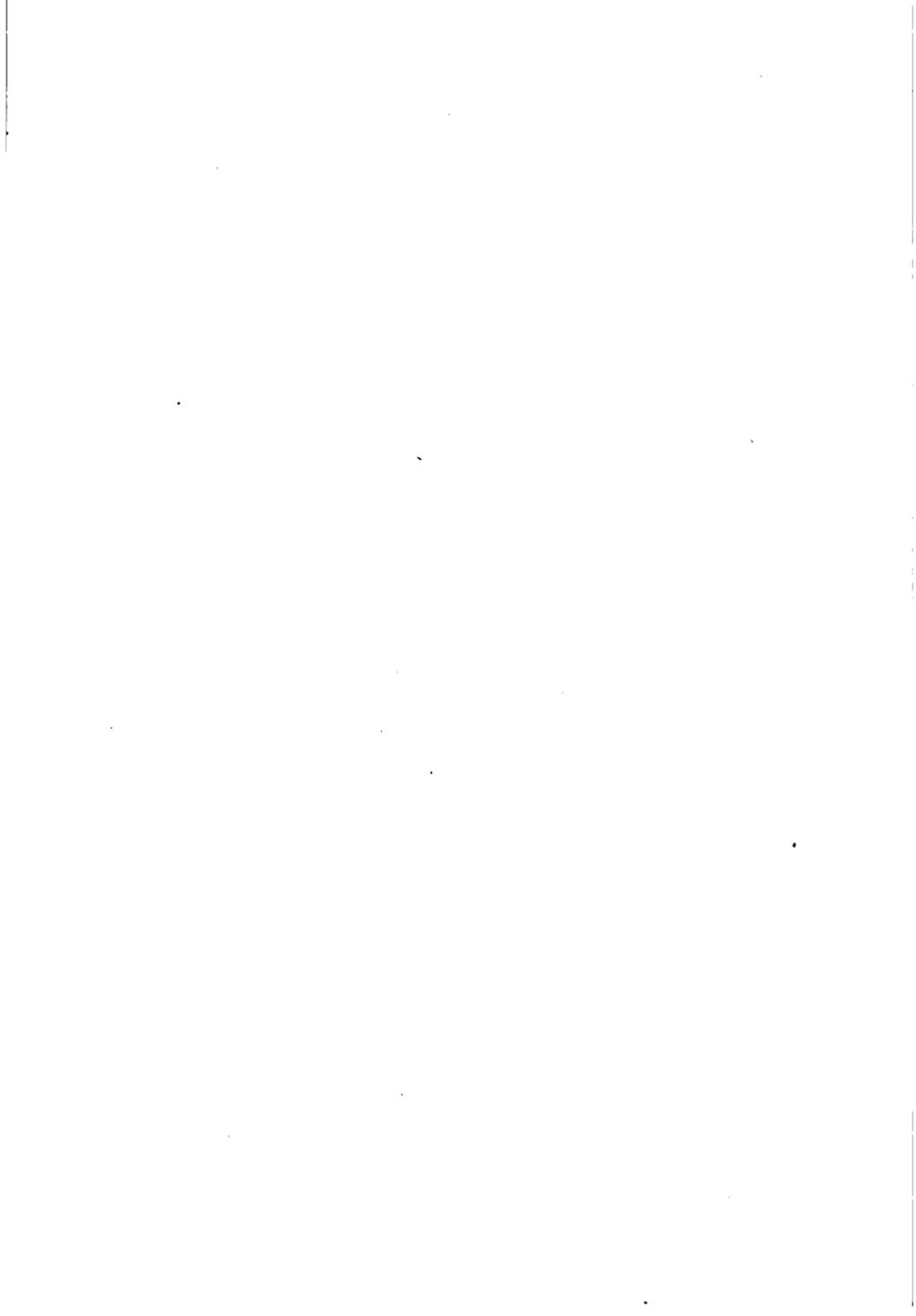
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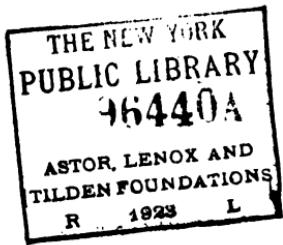
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By JOHN C. WRIGHT
Author of "The Crooked Tree"

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DEDICATION

To Chief Blackbird, an educated Indian, who always claimed that the prophets of the Old Testament were aware of the existence of a race of people on the western hemisphere; to Henry R. Schoolcraft, whose writings indicated that the Indians were familiar with at least some of the Bible stories; and to other investigators, whose efforts demonstrated that the intense religious instinct of the American aborigines, so puzzling to many, was not due to haphazard chance, but was the result of momentous events that occurred at the beginning of the Christian Era.

“For this thing was not done in a corner.”
—St. Paul

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago a Chicago gentleman and his wife spent several months at a northern resort near which there dwelt the remnants of a tribe of Ottawas. The couple made numerous visits to the Indian settlements and became greatly interested in the local legends and traditions. While making these trips their curiosity was especially aroused by the frequency of the mention of the name of Na-na Bo-sho. Always in their investigations and inquiries it appeared; in fact, they heard so much about this Wonder-Worker of the Algonquin tribes, that they determined to learn all they could concerning him.

At one of the hotels in the neighborhood, the lady one day related her experience to a friend and casually asked if he could give her any inkling or information that might assist her in her search.

"It appears that all Indian lore centers around the figure of Na-na Bo-sho," she declared. "Everywhere we go among the Indians they have something to say about him—some wonderful story to relate. I wish I might find someone who could tell me his whole history. It must have been a remarkable one and I am so interested in the matter."

An old French-Canadian guide, who happened

to be sitting nearby, overheard the conversation. Arising with hat in hand he approached the lady and asked:

"You want to find out 'bout Na-na Bo-sho?"

"Indeed I do," replied the woman, turning toward him. "Do you speak Indian? Do you know any reliable party who can tell me his story?"

"I know all 'bout him, me, myself," assured the guide. "On my house is paper Frenchman write long, long time 'go zat geeves ze life of Na-na Bo-sho."

This information served to greatly excite the woman. "Oh, I must see it!" she exclaimed. "Certainly something has been written about this remarkable person. I shall be so glad to examine anything you may have upon the subject."

She thereupon employed the old guide to take her to his home and show her the paper in question.

It proved to be an age-worn, French manuscript, probably written by one of the early voyageurs in the northern lake region. It purported to be the true story of Na-na Bo-sho, the Miracle Man of the Algonquins, as told the writer by the Indians when he first came to the New World.

The manuscript was purchased by the lady and her husband, and though some of the pages were badly torn and effaced, a transcript was made. "The Great Myth" was the result.

J. C. W.

The Ancient Manuscript

(Found in an old house at Middle Village, Michigan.)

PREFACE

These people (the Indians) believe that at one time there was a large city in the interior of the continent. Some of the tribes also maintain that their ancestors crossed the ocean. They say that horses were always to be found in this country; that they were not introduced by the Spaniards but roamed the western prairies long before the time of Columbus. A tradition says there was once a tribe with light skin and hair. They have stories not unlike our own, regarding the creation, the deluge and the hereafter. The greatest man that ever lived amongst them they call Na-na Bo-sho. He is a prototype of John the Baptist or one of the apostles. It was not Hiawatha. Hiawatha was an Iroquoian chieftain who lived recently. He was a great leader and reformer but not a super-man. Na-na Bo-sho performed miracles and was raised to the rank of a demigod. He is not in any wise confused by the Indians with the Great Spirit who rules over all. Na-na Bo-sho was brave, wise and humble, and possessed a remarkable code of honor. He was a sage, a peace-maker and a friend to all mankind.

The most important as well as the most powerful tribe I have come in contact with is the Ojibway, or Chippewas as some call them. They are descended from the Mound People. They are friendly, intelligent and honorable; are intensely religious and do not believe in warfare except for defensive purposes. They laugh a great deal. They probably would have dominated the continent in the course of time had not the arrival of the Caucasian put an end to their natural development.

Out of all the tales, myths and traditions that I have heard from these people I have been able to construct the following story. It may be true and it may not be true; but according to my best knowledge and belief the incidents hereinafter related actually occurred on the American continent at the time indicated.

Jean Couchois.

The Great Myth

Chapter I

A surging multitude, clamorous and impatient, had congregated near Terrazan to participate in the annual sacrificial ceremonies. Young men and aged patriarchs, women with babes in their arms, and girls and boys in unprecedented numbers intermingled in apparent confusion. The air was surcharged with an excitement and expectancy that plainly betokened the portentous events that were about to occur within the city.

While this complex assemblage awaited the opening of the huge gates to admit the people to the festivities, an old man, accompanied by an attractive and comely maiden, with a retinue of four male servants, approached the eastern postern, in an elaborately carved caravan drawn by four white buffalo steers. The little procession stopped before joining the multitude and one of the attendants stepped to the side of the carriage and assisted the old man and his companion to the ground.

"It will be best to remain here, in the rear of the crowd," said the patriarch, looking around. "Keep near to me, Ona; do not stray far from the caravan."

As the girl drew close to comply with his request, the old man placed his hand tenderly upon her head and inquired with a kind and benevolent expression:

"Are you tired, my daughter, from your long journey?"

The maiden turned intuitively in the direction of Terrazan, the majestic capital, and her eyes sparkled with admiration at the magnificent spectacle.

"Not in the least," she answered; "and if I were, the sight of yonder beautiful city would soon give me renewed strength and vigor."

Terrazan, situated not far from the Father of Waters, whence it proudly dominated the Mound Builder empire, was in gala attire. Brightly colored streamers floated from the parapets of its outer walls; and immense religious symbols glistening above the massive gates opening to the four cardinal points of the compass, announced the Annual Sacrificial Feast of the Sun.

Piercing the sky at the top of the spacious wooden temple in the center of the walled city, now bathed in red by the fiery glow of the setting sun, could be seen the altar of sacrifice at the summit of a long flight of hewn cypress steps leading to it from the west. Priests and acolytes in robes and vestments, passing and repassing each other, preparatory to the celebration of the

fete, appeared as an army of tiny manikins in the distance.

A host of spectators from all parts of the empire had gathered along the Akrifal, the primitive highway leading from the seaboard of the distant Atlantic. Four such roads or trails entered the city of Terrazan:—one from the mines of the copper diggers of the north; one from the villages of the black-haired Sigourians of the east; one from the rich agricultural fields of the south; and one from the buffalo lands of the west. But the Akrifal, coming from the regions of the morning light, was the favorite approach to the city, and here was assembled an immense throng waiting for the great gate to swing open. For three whole days prior to the ceremonies, all entrances to the city had been closed, and some of the travelers had camped by the roadside for hours that they might be among the first to enter. At times certain of the pilgrims could be observed making salaams or kneeling low to the great Sun-god, as they beat upon their breasts or foreheads.

The reflection from the many glittering symbols and sun discs upon the city walls and from the burnished gold and copper ornamentations of the altar and tower of the temple cast a radiance of such magnificence that the spectator, if he

were present for the first time, must be held spell-bound in wonderment and awe.

"It is well worth traveling many miles to see," observed the patriarch. "But it has not the same glory," he sighed, "as when I first beheld it in the reign of Almedo, the Wise and Just. Alas! his successors are weak and improvident. Witness the portico at the main entrance of the Akrifal. You can see its summit by looking over the tent top yonder."

The old man pointed a trembling finger at the great gate and continued:

"How cracked and crumbling it appears to be. Not so in the days of Almedo. All the walls, buildings and terraces were maintained in perfect condition. No defect was ever found that did not receive immediate attention. The Akrifal itself, this once superb thoroughfare, is little more than a cowpath. And the western roadway is in even worse condition. We have taken ten entire days to reach Terrazan from the foothills when we should have made the trip with our splendid yokes in less than eight. Razak, the present ruler, delights in surrounding himself with admirers and charlatans; luxury and vice are the main diversions of the capital. Small wonder the city is losing its ancient grandeur and influence. The army is everything at the present time and in developing this branch of the government it

must be admitted that Razak has shown some wisdom, for only a great army can hold people in subjection under such corrupt and unfortunate conditions."

Ona gazed in wonder at the splendid picture spread out before her. "What building is that in the abbatis on the left?" she inquired, as her attention was attracted by an imposing structure, second in magnitude only to the temple.

"May the prophets be praised! God has put it into your heart, my child, to ask regarding it. That was the worship-house of our forefathers, the noble Montiguans, before the days of Razak. It was built by Mons, the tenth ruler, and in it for centuries his followers worshipped in a pious and devout manner. All ceremonies were heliacal—and people sang praises to the sun, but never offered human sacrifice. The Sigourians solely are responsible for that abominable practice. When these short-heads of the east and the Montiguans united, the present temple was built in honor of the event. Stones and slabs of granite for the altar were drawn from the distant mountains and the parvis was enclosed with the choicest magnolia wood obtainable. It is, indeed, an imposing edifice, but withal has not the graceful lines of the older building whose shafts, corbels and entablature are pronounced the finest in the empire. Upon a former occasion, when your mother was still living, we made an inspection of

this ancient building and viewed the city from its campanile. It was a wonderful sight and one she never ceased speaking of."

"How interesting" replied Ona. "I love it for its associations and shall always esteem it higher than its modern replica, knowing that its altars have never been defiled by the blood of innocent victims. If Terrazan could be converted I doubt not its glory would fill the world."

As the two stood contemplating the city of which Ona had heard so much since her childhood, the yokels finished their tasks and the leader, a muscular, skin-clad driver, came to her father for further orders.

"Geroth," said the old man, turning to the servant; "did the courier whom we met as we reached the Akrifal say whether any victims would be chosen for the sacrifice from the out-lying districts? I understood him to make the assertion, but I am hard of hearing and could not exactly catch his words."

"One, Sire Rabinka," replied the driver, whose head was as shaggy as the mane of his bisons. "The King's Counsellor has issued a manifesto, approved by the emperor, placing a ban on the new creed. One of its followers from out the city will be sacrificed to prevent its spread through the empire. If the teaching is not suppressed, King Razak threatens to make wholesale executions."

"This is as I anticipated," said the aged Rabinka. "We must be most cautious from now on. Beware the sentinels and commit no act that will cause suspicion."

Falling on his knees he bowed low to the sun, as an officer of Razak's legionaries with spear in hand approached and sternly surveyed the party. The others of the household quickly followed their leader's example.

When the sentinel had passed on to a safe distance Rabinka arose and continued:

"To us this ceremony is abominable and loathsome, but, my children, for our personal safety we must simulate obedience. God in his great mercy will forgive us."

Taking Ona by the hand he stroked her hair affectionately and pressed his lips to her brow.

"Should you ever become a victim of this unholy and infamous custom, my child, your blood would call for vengeance on high. Human life is too precious to warrant its being offered up as a sacrifice by any monarch, however great or renowned.

The girl, attired in a light embroidered robe loosely thrown over the shoulders, girded by a wide ornamented sash, her golden hair waving in the breeze and her countenance aglow in its youth and freshness, drew close to her parent as though seeking protection.

"They cannot know, father, that we are not in accord with the established belief if we remain quietly by ourselves and refrain from making any open demonstration. We must try to be composed, no matter how repulsive the orgies may be."

"I myself am old and feeble and not long for this world, replied Rabinka. "I am not afraid to die for our glorious cause if necessary, especially if by so doing I can help convert others to the true faith. But for your sake, we must be on our guard until such time as our brothers, through the grace of Providence, shall become numerous enough to capture the government and thus preserve the dynasty of the Montiguans."

As he spoke a commotion was observed in the mass of humanity ahead. A crier was running about, announcing that the great gate of the Akrifal would be thrown open at sunrise and it was King Razak's personal desire that all visitors should enter and take part in the ceremonies of the day.

An old amulet vendor, with basket in hand, eager to hear the announcement, forced his way to the edge of the crowd without noticing an approaching cavalcade. Those about him, falling back, escaped the horses; but the peddler was jostled and knocked down, his wares flying in all directions. The spectators jeered and hooted

and several roisterers began picking up the amulets and carrying them off. This so angered the peddler that he seized a club and threw it at one of the miscreants but by mistake struck a horse of the cavalcade. The animal reared and plunged and nearly threw its rider to the ground. The enraged soldier finally subdued his frightened charger and fiercely assailed the vendor of amulets. He was about to impale him with his spear, when the leader of the horsemen, a handsome, athletic youth, rode up and arrested his arm.

"Never mind, Zanto," he said. "Your horse is uninjured and it ill behooves one of my soldiers to strike a defenseless citizen."

Abashed, the other lowered his weapon and rejoined his companions.

Many of those standing near by, among whom were Ona and her father, unused to hearing such sentiments from officers of the army, applauded the reprimand and the young commander looked in their direction. For a moment his gaze rested full upon the features of Ona. He was startled and almost confused by the beauty of the maiden. It seemed as though a choice and rare flower had suddenly sprang up before him. He urged his horse forward and was on the point of speaking, when the blare of a trumpet from the gateway caused all eyes to turn in that direction. It was the king's signal for his horsemen to assemble. The young officer smiled kindly and with a low

bow wheeled and rode back to his place at the head of his troopers.

Ona returned the smile, blushing deeply, and for several moments watched the retreating cavalcade. Charmed and fascinated by this favor of the dashing officer, she stood as in a reverie, contemplating the experiences of the past few days and the events that had led to the pleasant encounter. Only a little while before, she had left her father's domain near the western mountains on her first pilgrimage to the capital of the empire. What dreams she had always had of the great city and its wonderful army! And now at last she stood before Terrazan in reality and was accosted by an officer of the king's legions! It seemed as though some fairy god-mother was taking her by the hand and leading her through charming vistas of sound and color. The vast assemblage, the horsemen, the towering temple, the walls and gateway—all combined to produce a gorgeous picture that appeared to her youthful mind too good to be true, too wonderful to be real. Then of a sudden she was overwhelmed by the thought that after all she and her friends were not in accord with the glitter and pomp spread out before them, for in the west they had embraced a new doctrine which committed them to a simple life of labor and service. Alas! though the young cavalier might smile upon her, she felt

that there was an interminable gulf between them, and that Terrazan in all its glory was only the center of a corrupt and degraded government. Out near the western mountains her people were peaceably engaged in buffalo and horse raising, and were prosperous and contented. They delighted in roaming over the broad prairies; in visiting the mountains, and in camping out in the open. They had wonderful gardens and farms and were adepts in the art of making pottery and stone implements. Though compelled to furnish warriors and to pay taxes and tribute for the support of the government, they were not warlike and deplored the fact that a military caste had been fostered and allowed to grow so powerful. Her reflections were centered on the superiority of the simple life of the woods and streams, of the glory of the mountains and the beauty of the western skies, when she became sensible that some person was standing close beside her.

She turned and discovered her father. "Oh, I am so glad you are here," she said with a little start. "I almost imagined I were alone."

The old man gently took his daughter's arm and led her away.

"Geroth," he said to his servant on reaching the caravan, "call your comrades and prepare for the night. We will camp here near the Akrifal and await the morning sun."

Chapter II

The brilliancy of Terrazan, the pride of the Mound People, on the following morning was never surpassed in the annals of its two thousand years of sun worship. The elaborate preparations in progress for the six busy weeks previously had at last culminated in a grand display of treasure and art that enthused the entire population. In the gaming and amusement centers of the city many new stalls and booths had been erected where the visiting throngs could seek diversion and entertainment, or stroll about in a labyrinth of shops and view the choice curios and wares. There were beautifully carved shells from the coast provinces of the southern seas; furs and silklike skins, richly embroidered, from the frozen regions of the far north; ornamented pottery, in exquisite designs, from the clay beds of the western valleys; and a variety of cutting tools, implements, pipes and beads from the marts of the east. Wonderful shell and bone ornaments, pestles, mortars, mauls and hammers revealed the ingenuity of remote tribes; while hematite spears and axes and tempered copper knives, crescents, picks and awls indicated the great progress artisans had attained in working the baser metals.

Many booths were devoted to a display of recently manufactured charm-stones, gorgets, boat-stones, tubes and rings. Every clan and all the leading families of the empire had its artifact by which it was represented, and these collections attracted wide attention. Large numbers of amulets—pendants, bird-stones and tablets—were hung about in great profusion to draw the admiration of those who might wish to increase their stock of personal emblems. These carefully wrought and finely polished ornaments were highly prized by the Mound Builders. They were not commonplace in any sense of the term; nor were they considered mere trinkets to be worn haphazard. They were sacred designs of federations of citizens and of societies—sometimes of tribes and bands of artisans—totems, or coats-of-arms, as it were, for which they were willing to perform great deeds of valor or lay down their lives if necessary. Some of the charm and ceremonial stones were of general use. Two groups, however, predominated in the show windows—the artistic bicave or discoidal stones, and the equally attractive bird-stones—the emblems respectively of the Sigourian and Montiguan races, the two extensive divisions whose members and followers made up the Mound Builder nation. The Montiguans and their sub-divisions used the various bicave charms, made in circular form in homage to the sun. The Sigourian charms were of the

birdlike variety, and many and curious were the designs. Practically all the artifacts on display were manufactured from banded slate, shale and porphyry.

As the early opponents to the state religion grew in numbers they, too, adopted a distinguishing sign; but being more or less secretly made, specimens were not to be found prominently displayed in any of the shops. They could be obtained only from those merchants, few in number, who belonged to the reformers, and by them they were guarded zealously and carefully concealed from the eyes of the curious. These emblems—artistic winged, or butterfly stones—were without doubt the most beautiful of all the artifacts for which the Mound People were famous. They were exquisitely and perfectly carved from the choicest material to be obtained at the quarries and always excited the admiration of those who beheld them. About the size of the third of a hand and quite flat and thin, they were worn by the dissenters upon their breasts underneath their garments.

Fruits, berries and toothsome viands were also to be seen in great abundance on improvised counters jutting out over the sidepaths. It was the end of the harvest season and the wealth of the continent was at the disposal of Terrazan. All workshops had suspended operations for five days

in honor of the fete, and all stores in the market districts were closed, except for a brief period after sundown.

Girls robed in white and boys in colored cloaks and sandalled feet paraded the streets chanting hymns to the sun, to the accompaniment of drums, trumpets and cymbals.

The dwellings of the city were nearly all of low, circular design, constructed from a mixture of mud, clay and straw, thatched with bark. They stood closely together with no fences between them and the principal streets were long, straight and broad, running directly north and south and east and west. The population of Terrazan at this time was not less than eighty thousand.

Legionaries riding two abreast on coal black steeds, carrying the regulation hematite-tipped spear, rode up and down the thoroughfares near the sidepaths to preserve order. A motley crowd ambled shiftlessly along the streets, between these guardsmen, joking and laughing, while awaiting the lighting of the fires on the altar of the temple. Traffic being temporarily at an end, the ruffians of the city had opportunity to jostle well-meaning citizens and commit minor misdemeanors that would not otherwise have been permitted.

It was well known that at high noon, following a signal of three wreathes of smoke and seven

beats upon a drum, the ceremony of the White Dog would take place, and on the second day of the feast at the same hour the human victims of the sacrifice would be offered up in full view of the assembled throng.

Men and women congregated to witness the atrocity; even children were not denied the privilege of viewing the debasing scene. It was the desire of the king and of the priests that as many of the citizens of the empire be present as possible. The ceremonials, insignia and mysticism of the proceedings were calculated to fill the on-looker with fear and awe. The populace of Terrazan and all visiting guests within the city were promised three days of royal revelry to repay them for their loyalty to the state religion. Feasts, dances and public games were the inducements offered as a reward to the faithful.

Near the noon hour therefore a heavy stream of humanity surged up the broad highway leading to the steps of the temple. The gates of the Akrifal had been thrown open in the early dawn and those persons coming from the distant parts of the empire had been allowed to take their places nearest the temple, whose massive steps were protected by a huge portcullis in front of which promenaded a score or more of heavily armed guards.

Ona and her father, accompanied by their

faithful driver, Geroth, were among the spectators who tarried in the rear. The other servants, being newly employed, were allowed to wander whither they pleased until needed for the return journey. Passing one of the side streets, in which some of the amusement places were located, a large sign attracted the girl's attention.

"May we not go in there and wait until the ceremony is over?" she asked wearily of her father.

"It's a gaming and drinking room," replied the old man; "and some of the legionaries would be certain to spy us."

"It's the only sign I've seen extending an invitation to women," she observed. "And we must conceal ourselves somewhere till after the revolting spectacle, for I am sure I do not care to witness it."

"We can go in and rest for a moment, at any rate," answered Rabinka, leading the way to the place in question.

Entering, he at once recognized it as one of the public resorts permitted by the city to dispense wahpoo, the national beverage. Like most of the business blocks, it was built with substantial walls of one story and was long and wide. Save for a few half-intoxicated stragglers on benches in the farther end, the place was vacated, its habitues having joined in the general excitement outside.

Seating themselves on one of the stone benches behind a long table at one side of the room, our friends were apparently safe from molestation.

The keeper of the resort, a dark, stockily built giantess, suspiciously shambled behind them from her watching place by the door, to inquire after their wants.

"Strange that you should be coming in at this late hour," she complained. "Haven't you been able to find a place of vantage near the temple?"

"We are weary from a long journey," replied Rabinka. "We must have rest and some of your famous vintage to relieve our thirst. Observing your inviting sign, we could not pass by." Thus speaking he drew forth from a leathern pouch several aureate pellets and a few small silver nuggets which he placed before her on the table.

The giantess smiled, her long upper teeth glistening like walrus tusks.

"I will bring the wahpoo," she replied, "but you will have to hurry and make your way out as soon as possible. I should have had my door barred, for the hour of sacrifice is near at hand."

Carefully selecting the silver and pushing the gold back toward Rabinka, she disappeared through a side door and presently returned with a stone jar filled to the brim.

"Drink, and pass out as soon as you are

through," she commanded. To the stragglers in the back end of the room she shouted:

"Here, you! Clear out of the place at once!
I am about to lock the door!"

Those in the rear immediately began to shuffle their way out.

Geroth filled his mug to overflowing and drank copiously.

Rabinka sipped some of the beverage sparingly and set it aside.

"Do not touch it, Ona," he counselled; "the sparkling water from the fount outside is much better. Wahpo is a vile intoxicating liquor, too much indulged in for the public good. Along with the other vices now prevalent it will undermine the national fiber. Geroth, our lion-limbed driver, may withstand its seductiveness, but for me one draught is quite enough."

The giantess suddenly returned to the table and admonished the party to not talk above a whisper.

"Guards are approaching," she informed her guests; "and you must not be found here at the noon hour."

Before she had finished speaking, two legionaries stepped through the door. Advancing to the interior of the darkened room they turned and surveyed the place with squinting eyes, from

every angle. Spying the travelers, they walked to the table.

"What are you doing here, Graybeard?" demanded the foremost. "Go at once and take your companions where you may view the sacrifice. The time is at hand and we are warning all law-breakers."

"What a handsome damsel," he added, glancing at Ona. "Upon my word, she should be with the vestals in the temple. Let us have some more of the wahpoo, Giantess, that we may drink to her health." And with the remark he seated himself beside the girl, who drew as closely as she could toward her father.

Gerorth, who had imbibed freely of the wahpoo, was feeling its effects. His blood-shot eyes rolled lazily—his shaggy head lunged forward and backward. His loose fur jacket revealed a pair of muscular shoulders and an immense, sinuous neck. The semi-barbarian was a veritable gladiator, toughened and trained on the boundless deserts of the west.

At this insulting remark to Ona he looked up and saw the soldier attempting to encircle the maiden's waist with his arm. Slowly rising to his full height he seized the legionary by the nape of the neck, gave him a terrific shake and literally lifted him off his feet. Jamming him down at the far end of the stone bench, he exclaimed:

"You infernal Dog of the Sun, stay there, where you belong!"

The other soldier drew his spear and rushed at the bison driver. But the latter promptly stepped aside until his assailant plunged by and then dealt him a staggering blow on the side of the head. The soldiers, amazed at the strength of Geroth, remained as though stupefied.

The giantess, alarmed, ran out into the street and called for help. Eight legionaries responded to her cries and as they entered the room, the woman whispered to the leader:

"They are members of the new religion—I heard that buffalo tamer call one of your comrades a 'Dog of the Sun'."

Rabinka and Ona, frightened by the disturbance, had withdrawn farther into the shadows of the room. But they were soon discovered and roughly seized and searched. Underneath the garments of both were found the tell-tale butterfly or winged-stones, hanging from small wampum chains fastened about their necks.

"These are known to be the evil omens of the heretics," said the legionary in command. Holding them up to better examine them, he was forced, in spite of himself, to admire their symmetry and beauty. "It matters not that they are so well made—those who wear them cannot be trusted. Take the prisoners to the dungeon. This

vagabond," he added, pointing to Geroth, "can go to the pounding-yard, where his muscular limbs can find better employment than in attacking soldiers of the empire."

Geroth straightened up in a belligerent fashion as if to defy the entire force of gendarmes; but a look and gesture from Rabinka caused him to desist. He was thereupon seized and marched away between six soldiers, shaking his bushy head in dismay.

Rabinka and Ona, the latter leaning sadly on her father's arm, were taken to the royal oubliette and incarcerated.

Chapter III

At the top of the temple, to the right of the sacrificial altar, was a large semi-circular enclosure, somewhat in the fashion of an amphitheatre, reached by a second flight of steps running from the chancel, where the royal family, its attendants, advisors, courtiers and princes assembled to witness the ceremonies.

King Razak, a dark complexioned man slightly above middle age, sat near the center of the enclosure, on an elaborately carved throne of orange wood, inlaid with syenite and jasper, wearing a gorgeous silken robe and a glittering crown bejewelled with many rare and brilliant gems. This man had risen by force of his genius from a menial among the lower classes, fighting his way inch by inch, to the highest position in the empire. In the wars between his people, the Sigourians and the Montiguans, before the two races united, he distinguished himself as a brave and daring leader and became at that period a popular hero. He had led his army across the western mountains and laid seige to one of the principal Montiguan cities, which he forced to capitulate after an arduous campaign. His return home was one long triumphal march and after the alliance

was effected he was acclaimed emperor of the united nation by the admiring population. Subsequently embittered by innumerable intrigues and plots against him, all of which he had so far successfully combatted, he now held the people in subjection with a despotic hand. As a diplomat and statesman he had shown great talent in the early part of his reign; but had in later days succumbed to the gaiety and luxury with which his court was surrounded and gave himself up almost wholly to pleasure and frivolity. Brooking no opposition, he was stern and severe in yielding the royal scepter. In stature he was of medium height and corpulent, and the expression of his countenance plainly indicated his contempt for the common people. His features, oval and regular like those of all the Sigourians, might be termed handsome, and his clever conversation made him a general favorite with his companions. Of late his main diversion was the persecution of the followers of a new faith which he could not comprehend and which was making marked progress in spite of his opposition.

At the right was his consort, Queen Liliah, a member of one of the leading families of the western Montiguans, or "long-headed" race, with whom the king had allied himself to more strongly cement his realm. Of a gentler disposition than her husband, she was inclined to sympathize

with the unfortunates of the land, greatly to the displeasure of the monarch. Tall and graceful, queenly and dignified in appearance and with a pleasing and friendly manner, she was much more popular than her husband with the masses.

At the left was the heir apparent—Donato—a handsome youth, tall like his mother and well proportioned; about twenty years of age, he was already commissioned with grave responsibility, being Master of the Horse, a position next to Generalissamo of the National Army, the military title of his father. The Master of the Horse commanded the superb cavalry divisions recruited from the ranks of the Montiguans, the expert horsemen of the plains.

Around the royal family were grouped attendants in flowing robes; courtiers and nobles gaily attired; magicians, necromancers, astrologers, clowns and beautiful dancing girls; while a long retinue of petty officials and hangers-on buzzed in as close proximity to the throne as possible.

From a private passageway leading through the vestry behind the altar a legionary suddenly appeared and saluted.

Motioning to a court messenger near by he handed him a note to be delivered to the king.

The messenger took it and passed it on to a clown who turned three or four hand-springs and landed bolt upright before the sovereign. Giving

him the message he turned somersaults backwards to his original position.

The feat greatly pleased the monarch who smiled and bowed in approval.

But upon reading the message he looked up with a scowl. "Tell the bearer to advance," he ordered.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the ruler, flourishing the note, as the soldier appeared before him.

"Your Highness, some of your men were attacked in a public cafe by servants of the wealthy buffalo raiser Rabinka, who was there in hiding with his daughter. One of your soldiers was nearly killed and another badly injured."

"Rabinka, the buffalo raiser!" repeated Razak in surprise. "Were he and his followers apprehended?"

"Yes, Your Highness, they are now in the oblige. I have come to bring you these charms which were found upon the persons of the buffalo raiser and his daughter." Hereupon the soldier produced the butterfly stones taken from Ona and her father.

Razak examined the exquisite charms and then handed them to the queen.

"How beautiful they are!" exclaimed the latter. "I am going to have them for my own."

"Don't take them all, I must have one," said

Donato, admiring them in turn. "I have not seen their equal in color, workmanship and form."

"They are the new designs being used by the secret sect of heretics," said Razak angrily. "Now is a good time to make an example of these foolish blasphemers. They claim to be a peaceful, law-abiding people, opposed to bloodshed; yet they attack soldiers of the empire in Terrazan on the holy days! A very consistent doctrine they are spreading, indeed! Rabinka and his daughter shall pay dearly for this outrage! By my star! this is the girl I shall select to be sacrificed as a warning to all those who would espouse a belief contrary to the wishes of the government."

"A wise judge is never hasty," demurred the queen.

"They are Montiguans and of course you wish to exonerate them," retorted Razak. "Your people are the principal ones fostering this devilish belief that has for its purpose the undermining of the empire. I propose to nip it in the bud."

Addressing one of his messengers he said: "Tell the heralds to again announce that on the third day of the festival, as an additional amusement for the people, a virgin from among the unbelievers will be immolated on the altar of the Sun."

Several of the clowns commenced cutting up

antics and jesting behind the throne. Turning savagely, Razak commanded them to desist:

"I'll have you all sent to the workyard if you interrupt me again. This is not the time nor place to be acting like monkeys."

Immediately straightening their faces, the clowns scampered to distant parts of the enclosure.

Razak shook his finger at them menacingly, then addressing himself to Donato, he lowered his voice and said:

"And you, my son, may go to the dungeon after the ceremony today and question the prisoners, for the purpose of learning what you can regarding the propaganda of these Christains—what they propose to do in case they capture and overturn the central government; what provisions they have for the army and the sacred temples; what they would substitute for the games, the festivals and our religious ceremonies. Let them explain, if they can, the unknown God they profess to believe in, whom no one can see nor hear nor detect in any manner and whom they foolishly imagine will some day make them great and glorious. Have them tell you, in fact, what excuse they have for seeking to abolish reverence for the Sun, the great creator and protector of life whose bounty and beneficence we can discern on every hand."

"I will do, Sire, as requested," replied Donato.

A chorus of several hundred girls, wearing wreaths and carrying palms, now entered the chancel. Four priests in gilded robes ascended the steps and attendants followed, bearing a spotless white dog for the sacrifice. Advancing to a position near the chancel railing, the high priest announced that two infants would be provided for the following day and a Christian girl for the next, to be offered up to the great Sun-god, at high noon, according to the ritual of the state religion, the infants being an oblation for the life and health of the people, and the girl, a sacrifice for the liberation of the empire from the heretical doctrine that had lately made its appearance. The present sacrifice of a white dog without blemish, with the burning of grain and fruits, was in thankfulness for the sunshine, rain and harvests and a sacred gift for the success of the artisans and the army.

Chanting and making mysterious signs, the pagan dignitaries securely bound the dog and deposited it upon the altar. Then with huge daggers they stabbed it in several vital places. The blood was caught in vessels which were left exposed that the rays of the sun might drink their contents. The flesh was cut into small pieces, some of which were burnt on incense in large brasiers and the rest carried to the great river that flowed

to the south, to further propitiate the insatiable Sun-god.

As the priests chanted and the curling smoke from the brasiers ascended on high, women of the lower castes shrank back and shuddered. With sensations of fear and abhorrence they contemplated what the morrow had in store. The annual fete for them was an event of tribulation and sorrow. It was from their ranks that the infants for the oblations were always chosen—and significantly it was from among their number also that a strange new religion having for its slogan, "Thou shalt not kill," was now secretly making rapid strides.

The upper classes, for whom the sacrifice was a mere diversion, viewed the affair with a different feeling. Accustomed to having their pleasures gratified, they looked upon this practice, fostered and fed by the priesthood, as one to which they were entitled by divine right; and hailed with apprehension any propaganda that sought its suppression.

Just prior to the events above described there appeared on the American continent a renowned prophet and seer who preached repentance and salvation. He claimed to have crossed the ocean in a small boat and to have been miraculously protected that he might deliver God's message in this part of the world. There are many reasons

for believing that this remarkable man was St. Thomas. In America he was known as St. Ojoban and was also familiarly called "Na-na Bo-sho." He preached in the villages along the Mississippi and its tributaries and exhorted the people to repent and to turn to the true God who was the creator of the sun and of the moon and of the entire universe. He taught the doctrine of brotherly love, raised the dead to life, caused the blind to see and the lame to walk. He made many converts and had considerable following, especially among the poor. The pagan priests denied his divine mission, ridiculed his tenets and advocated the persecution of his adherents.

The announcement that two infants were to be sacrificed upon the second day of the feast and a Christian girl upon the third was therefore received with great rejoicing in the auditorium, balconies and private boxes of the temple; but in the crowd below and in the hovels of the poor there were heartaches, groans and lamentations.

Chapter IV

After winding through several streets the legionaries in charge of Geroth reached a large enclosure which they entered through a conduit underneath the southern wall of the city. In this enclosure scores of workmen were busy with pestles and mortars pounding and grinding corn which was subsequently transferred to huge bins. The yard, being unroofed, afforded no protection to the workers from the rays of the burning mid-day sun; but small thatched coverings fastened on poles sheltered the bags of corn and the meal in the bins. A high stone fence on which bowmen were stationed at intervals surrounded the place and two monstrous wolf dogs in leash snarled with jaws agape near the entrance of the conduit. This workyard was the municipal granary of Terrazan, or more properly speaking, one of the extensive meal and flour centers of the Mound Builder empire, where convicts, malcontents and criminals were compelled to work out their fines and expiate their crimes.

Near the center of the yard stood an unusually large contrivance, somewhat similar in appearance to the centrifugal governor of a modern steam engine. This odd looking affair consisted

of a stout oaken beam, balanced on a heavy center post, with enormous oval rocks dangling at either end. Stone basins were placed in the ground directly underneath the ovals, thus forming two immense pounding devices that could be operated simultaneously by teetering the beam. Additional basins were provided and so arranged that by swinging the beam half way around, the pounders could be kept in motion while the two first basins were being emptied and refilled, and vice versa, the work of transferring from one set to the other causing little loss of time.

For many days the cumbersome machine had been standing idle, owing to the fact that the yard contained no convict powerful enough to endure the labor.

The operator was obliged to stand with up-raised arms and teeter the beam until exhausted, guardsmen standing over him with lashes to accelerate his speed. Many powerful workmen had been utterly overcome and ruined for life by the gigantic man-killer.

When those in charge of Geroth entered the yard, the leader conducted the captive to the immense pounder and motioned to the officer of the yard.

"Here's a fellow I warrant can pound corn faster than you can pour it into the basins," he

said as the official approached; "this is exactly the kind of a machine needed for him."

"I'm sorry, but we've had to abandon it," replied the man in charge. "The one who invented it was a fool. Not one man in a thousand is strong enough to raise the beam, let alone to teeter it for any length of time. It's too heavy and unwieldy and has killed too many good men already. Leave your prisoner with me and I'll set him to work at something else."

"The miscreant deserves the severest treatment you can give him," said the legionary. "Should he die on your hands it would be no loss to the empire."

The officer of the yard surveyed Geroth from head to foot.

"The loss would be incalculable, if I am any judge," he replied. "Upon my word, I never saw a better built fellow in my life." Taking hold of Geroth's arm he admiringly felt of his superb muscles. "What crime has he been arrested for?"

"Apostasy! He has abjured our sacred religion and attacked soldiers of King Razak. Be not lenient with him, I beseech you."

"A defamer of the Sun-god!" exclaimed the officer, stepping back in amazement. "The offence is unpardonable. You are right, the blasphemy de-

mands the severest punishment we can administer."

Without further argument he called several assistants and commanded them to place the operator's straps upon the giant.

Making no resistance, Geroth allowed them to proceed and even raised his arms to the task before him. There being no alternative, he obeyed orders, but nevertheless did not propose to submit to torture any longer than was necessary. All his subtle craftiness was employed in formulating a plan of escape. Knowing that Rabinka was not present to interfere he prepared to wreck a terrible vengeance on his persecutors.

During the above conversation and subsequent delay he had carefully studied the pounding machine, and if his deductions were correct, its construction afforded him his opportunity.

At a nod from the officer a number of prisoners came running with baskets of corn which they poured into the basins, and the ponderous stones began their monotonous thump, thump—thump, thump, as the giant's mighty arms teetered the beam. After a few moment's work, however, he stopped abruptly and held the beam until it was in a horizontal position and then leisurely swung it half way around into place over the other basins.

"Heigh! You rascal!" shouted the master of

the yard as he looked over his shoulder and perceived what Geroth was doing. "The corn is not half pounded. Swing the pestles back again and do your work properly or we shall use the raw-hides."

Geroth, feigning ignorance, deftly turned the beam back to its original position; not, however, without an inward feeling of satisfaction, for the maneuver had been merely a part of a well laid scheme. As he had turned the beam upon its swivel, although its motion was slow, he noted that the pestles had swung slightly outward, and consequently concluded that they would fly around at a dangerous angle should he swing the beam swiftly enough.

His next step consisted in gathering as many of his oppressors as possible about him—and this he accomplished by singing a spirited western prairie song that he had known since childhood, at the top of his stentorian voice.

All eyes in the yard were soon upon him, and officers, legionaries and guardsmen crowded about, surprised to hear a man sing while performing such arduous labor. The giant's knotted arms resembled huge piston rods as they shot upwards and back again, lifting the pestles as though they were mere pebbles.

All at once, without warning, he gave the cross-beam a terrific twist and kept it whirling, much as

a boy might do with an inverted paper boat on the end of his finger. The pestles flew out with irresistible force, knocking down and maiming at least a dozen men. One of the massive rocks in its sudden gyration broke loose from its fastenings and shot across the yard like a canon ball. Striking a guardsman, whom it killed outright, it bowled over a score of officers and workmen and rolled against one of the wolf dogs which it crushed beneath its ponderous weight.

The yard was instantly in an uproar. Work was suspended and officers and guardsmen rushed toward the scene of tumult. Geroth, in the excitement, unfastened his harness and darted over the bodies of those who had fallen. Quickly reaching the conduit, he ran into the open street. The bowmen, afraid of hitting their comrades, dared not shoot at him in the yard, and after reaching the street the crowd coming from the sacrificial feast was so dense and boistrous that he was soon lost sight of.

Elbowing his way through the mass of humanity, he came upon a water carrier who had placed his burden on the ground and was leaning against a tree near one of the sidepaths to rest himself. Geroth decided to stop long enough to inquire the way to the oubliette where he heard the legionaries say they were going to imprison Ona and her father.

In response to the question the water carrier looked up at him and smiled:

"I should think," said he, "that you would try to avoid the place rather than to be looking for it."

"I have friends there," returned Geroth. "They have been unjustly arrested and need my assistance."

"To be unjustly arrested in Terrazan is nothing unusual," said the water carrier kindly. "But I see it has made you pale and nervous. Would you not care to refresh yourself with some of this cool, delicious water?" he inquired, as he uncovered his bucket and moved it invitingly towards Geroth.

The giant took the large vessel in his hands and lifted it to his mouth as though it were a mere cup. He drank long and eagerly, the water carrier looking on in apparent delight.

Putting the bucket down, Geroth cautiously turned about to see that no one was near enough to hear, then he stooped over and in a low tone asked:

"Are you a Christian, my friend?"

"No, but I have heard considerable about the new religion. It is gaining ground, I understand, and is making the king and his friends uneasy. I am going to take instructions and may join it—the present regime is too tyranical and op-

pressive. If conditions continue as they are, the common classes will lose every vestige of their liberties. What kind of people are the Christians, can you tell me?"

"If they are all like my master Rabinka and his daughter Ona, who are in the jail, you will never find better people anywhere, I can vouch for that. All those I have met are true and honorable. You will make no mistake in uniting with them. I have only one fault to find and that is that they won't let me fight my foes as I should love to do. I could have killed every one of our assailants, had not my employer requested me not to do so. But I don't propose to submit any longer, nor to run away like a cowardly coyote. Hurry and show me where the dungeon is and if anyone dares to attack me there he'll find out that Geroth is not to be trifled with."

As he made the threat, the lines of his face straightened in grim determination.

"I wish you success," replied the water carrier. "You will find the oublie in the rear of the temple. Follow straight along the second street."

Geroth thanked the man for his kindness and immediately departed in quest of his friends. He had continued his journey but a short distance, however, when he came upon a frail shawl-

covered woman who was having an animated discussion with a legionary on foot. Having by this time acquired a keen contempt for the king's soldiers whether foot or horsemen, he tarried to hear what the conversation was about, and discovered that the woman was pleading for the return of her babe which had been taken from her breast for the sacrifice of the coming day.

"You should be proud to be the recipient of this honor, instead of making a fuss over it," said the legionary. "Step out of my path before you are knocked down."

The woman with upraised hands knelt in despair in front of the legionary and clutched at his garments.

"I am not opposed to the sacrifice," she moaned, "but the child is all I have and I cannot give it up. When the soldiers entered my cabin and took it away from me yesterday I thought I would be driven wild. I am unable to sleep and have walked the streets of Terrazan for hours to try to find someone of influence who is willing to render me assistance. Won't you ask the King's Counsellor to say a word in my behalf?"

"The King's Counsellor has more business than he can attend to now," answered the soldier, roughly pushing the woman aside. "Besides it

would do no good. The priests must have their victims for the sacrifice, and those who are called upon to furnish them should feel exalted and overjoyed; they should rejoice and give praises to the great Sun-god to think they can bestow this signal service on the empire, rather than to go bawling about after the fashion of sick calves."

With these cutting remarks he jerked away from the woman who sought to cling to his trappings, and hurried down the street.

Geroth, sufficiently angry to overtake and strangle the ruffian on the spot, recollected his experience of the previous day, and decided upon a wiser course.

All the indignation of which his wild nature was capable was now aroused against the barbarous custom which was being brought home to him in all its hideousness. He had always worked in the fertile fields of the west, herding buffaloes, riding over boundless prairies or tramping through the neighboring forests. He had of course heard of his tyrant king, of the temple ceremonies and of the sacrifices, but Terrazan was a long ways off and he had never come into close contact with its corrupt government. Up to this time he had had little interest in these matters and he and his friends had come to the annual feast more because St. Ojoban was

said to be in the vicinity of the capital than for any other reason. In the light of the new faith that had lately dawned on the continent he knew that the practices in vogue were vicious and to be shunned; but now, having personally seen the extreme bestiality of the old belief, he resolved to exert his power to combat it. Relying for success on his marvelous strength and in the help of the Almighty, he told the despairing woman to be of good cheer; that God would raise up friends to aid her and that her infant might yet be spared.

The poor creature looked up at the giant with tear-dimmed eyes. She scarce could comprehend his discourse. To her, God meant the false deity of sun worship whose priests and adherents sacrificed children and oppressed the poor.

"No, no," she sobbed; "God will never aid me. He demands the life of my child and I must obey."

"Poor woman," thought Geroth, "she has not yet learned the truth."

"You must have faith in the true God," he said—"not in the false god of Terrazan. The true God loves all children and their mothers and does not wish to have any human being sacrificed."

The woman stared at him with vacant eyes.

What could he mean? Was it possible that a merciful God such as he described existed and that there was indeed a chance for her and her precious infant?

Her mingled emotions of joy, hope and fear made her mute and speechless.

"What I tell you is the truth," assured Geroth. "There is another God greater than that of King Razak's. Believe in Him and do not despair."

Placing a butterfly stone in the woman's hand with the admonition to always keep it as it was the emblem of the new belief, he darted off toward the dungeon.

Chapter V

Soon after receiving instructions from his father, Donato made his way to the basement of the temple and thence to the cells of the building in which Ona and her father were incarcerated.

The prison was not a part of the temple proper but was connected with it by a tortuous underground passage of some length, protected by palisades which met at the top and were braced by large cross-beams at regular intervals. The floor, similar to that of the oublie, was constructed of heavy cobble-stones, embedded in clay. The tunnel, triangular in form, was dark and difficult of passage. The oublie itself was of squat appearance, being deeply sunken in the ground. Only the roof and a small portion of its upper walls were visible from the outside. One window, or rather a small circular hole in the roof, provided the only light and means of ventilation. Running the full length of the building, from the tunnel door to another, opening into an obscure and narrow alley, was a corridor on either side of which were the cells.

Entering this room, Donato called to the jailor

and inquired for the prisoners. The official, a stalwart man in leather hauberk, was pacing the floor in the semi-darkness. Startled at this unexpected appearance of the Master of the Horse, he stood at guard for a moment, when a sharp reprimand from Donato caused him to lower his spear. Recognizing his visitor, he hurriedly led the way to the middle of the corridor where he pointed to two doors.

"I have placed them, my Lord, where they are as secure as though the earth had opened and swallowed them up."

"Unlock the door, that I may speak to the girl," said Donato.

"The noble Prince of Terrazan may command and compel Orak to obey; but for none other, except the king himself, would I consent to unlock either door."

"Donato is glad to find his father's servants faithful to their trust; but have no fear—the king has ordered me hither."

Entirely reassured, the jailor took one of the huge iron keys dangling from a cord at his side and opened the nearest cell. As the door creaked on its hinges it admitted a faint light which revealed Ona in a kneeling posture at the farther end of the small room.

Donato started in surprise.

"Is this the daughter of Rabinka, the buffalo raiser?" he asked, entering the cell.

The girl immediately recognized the trooper who had smiled upon her at the gate of the Akrifal. His tones were not those of a tyrant and she remembered how he had befriended the amulet vendor. Though startled and fearful at first, she was emboldened by his attitude to reply:

"Yes, I am proud to have that honor; and whatever fate is in store for me, I beg of you to have mercy on him who is old and feeble and not deserving of ill-treatment."

"It is most unfortunate that your servants attacked the soldiers," said Donato, trying to be composed. "No offence would be considered more serious by the authorities of Terrazan. The army here is idolized."

Ona had arisen and stood facing the prince. Her tear-stained features plainly indicated her anguish and distress.

"You have been misinformed regarding the incident in the cafe," she answered. "We never quarrel nor cause disturbances—it is not permitted by our belief. We were the ones attacked, and suffered arrest rather than defend ourselves by shedding blood."

"I understand that you and your father are

of a new religion, which is working against the state."

"We are Christians, but not a menace to any righteous government."

"But your men refuse to protect themselves—they have not the courage to fight. This is the worst accusation that can be brought against a Mound Builder. I am sorry to say, but your organization seems to consist mostly of cowards."

"Not cowards," corrected Ona, "but followers of Christ who was crucified for mankind. If he could suffer for us and not complain how much more should we be willing to undergo humiliation and pain for his sake. He came to teach love, not hatred; the new commandment is: 'Love God and one another'."

Donato, interested in this unusual discourse and charmed by the simplicity of the maiden, seated himself on the low bench that served as a bed for the prisoner. How he should have liked to take her in his arms and press her to his bosom. He knew that any other girl in Terrazan would be flattered by the adventure. Ona had discarded her outer robe and her rounded and shapely form was outlined through her soft clinging garments in all its voluptuousness. She was alone and defenseless. There was no civil statute to protect her and well might the king's

son have done as he listed. His sensual nature was aroused, but something superior and indefinable in this fascinating and remarkable girl compelled him to regard her only with respect.

"Fear not," he said gently, "I am not here to do you harm. I remember having seen you at the gate of the Akrifal and have since lived in hopes that I might meet you again. Please sit down and tell me more about your interesting doctrine. The king thinks it is intended to upset his realm and annul all our sacred institutions, including the festivals and sun sacrifice. Is that true?"

Ona, animated by her faith and no longer afraid, seated herself as requested. She was glad of an opportunity to explain her religion and a new hope dawned in her breast as she realized that her words might be the means of converting this fine, soldierly young man whom she perceived was not altogether antagonistic.

"Yes, it is true, because sun worship is entirely wrong," she replied. "We desire to replace it with an infinitely better and greater religion—one not founded upon fear nor superstition. Is it not far more sensible and wiser to do away with these frightful orgies and worship the Creator of the sun, whom you must admit is greater than the thing He created, which is only another planet similar to our own?"

"But it gives us warmth and light, without which we would be unable to exist. We cannot comprehend such a Creator as you speak of. The sun is the source of all blessings and benefits, even of life itself, as we sun worshippers view it."

"You are wrong to reason thuswise. The sun gives us light and heat; but God is greater than that—He gives us knowledge, love and grace. He created the universe which consists of many thousands of suns, moons and stars. He created man in His image and gave to each person an immortal soul which He desires to save that it may enjoy everlasting happiness in the heaven where He reigns. It is wrong to kill and offer human sacrifice—one soul is as precious to God as another."

"Except the souls of slaves and beggars—your God surely doesn't care about them."

"Yes, He cares even for them," said the girl with assurance. "There are none so low nor inconsequential but that God desires to have them for His kingdom. Our worth is not measured by our wealth here upon the earth—our acts of kindness, charity, brotherly love and love for God are what build up treasures for the soul in the heaven of the Christians."

Donato was deep in meditation over this statement when darkness suddenly filled the cell and

Ona heard a voice calling her by name. She immediately ran to the door and looked up in the direction whence the sound proceeded. Sticking through the aperture in the roof was Geroth's bushy head, his eyes trying to peer into the inner gloom of the prison.

Orak raised his spear.

"Don't hurt him!" implored the girl. "It's our servant, Geroth. Please let him come down."

"I am ordered to kill anyone caught forcing his way into this building!" said the excited jailor, making ready for a thrust. But at that instant Donato's hand gripped his arm and held it tightly.

"Wait," said the prince calmly; "I will be responsible for his behavior."

By this time Geroth's eyes began to accustom themselves to the semi-darkness of the corridor. Perceiving Ona and her companions, he commanded the two men to set her at liberty at once, threatening to come down and beat out their brains if they refused to do so.

"Descend," said Donato. "No harm will befall you or your mistress."

Thus kindly spoken to, Geroth dropped nimbly to the floor, which was not more than eight or ten feet from the window. Rushing to Ona's side, he inquired if she were injured.

"No," was her reply; "but I am distressed for my father. He cannot stand these hardships."

"Where is he?" asked the servant.

Ona cast an inquiring glance at the jailor.

"In there," said Orak, pointing to the next cell.

Rabinka, having heard the commotion, now began knocking loudly at the door.

"Open it," said Donato, "and let the servant share the room with his master."

Orak reluctantly stepped to the cell. He scarcely had time to turn the key before Rabinka pushed the door open and stepped forth. Ona rushed to her father and embraced him.

"The Lord has sent a friend to help us," she whispered. "Come, you will be able to convince him that ours is the true faith."

Taking hold of his robe she led him to Donato.

"This, Sir, is my father, the good Rabinka. Can you not have him released from this dungeon?"

Donato grasped the old man's hand.

"I have heard of you," said the young soldier, "and I am sorry for your distress. I will order food and then we can talk of other matters."

Dispatching Orak, he continued: "No doubt you realize that you are in imminent danger—the crime of which you are accused is punishable by death. But I shall endeavor to protect you and will do all I can to save your lives."

"Then you, also, are a Christian," said Rabinka.

"No; I am Donato, the son of Razak the emperor. I have much power but not enough to save you, were it known that I am attempting to do so. I have become interested in your religion—its tenets appeal to me strongly and I am anxious to learn more about it. But we will not have time to discuss it here—we must be on our guard."

Ona had not before known the true identity of her visitor. She realized of course that he was a person of importance, but the statement that he was the son of King Razak took her completely by surprise.

"The Prince of Terrazan!" she exclaimed half-aloud. Then gladly the thought came: "Surely he is in a position to give us aid."

"Go to the Cave of Phantoms," said Rabinka; "St. Ojoban, a disciple from Judea, is preaching there nightly in accordance with the Master's last commandment that his gospel should be taught to all nations. Hear the wonderful story direct from his lips and you will doubt no more. He is God's messenger to this part of the world, who saw Christ the crucified, and is preaching salvation to every creature in His name."

"Here comes Orak with the food and we cannot talk longer on the subject at this time," cau-

tioned the prince. "He is a faithful servant and stands very near to the throne. But rest assured that I am deeply concerned in you and your religion and will visit the Cave of Phantoms as requested. I entreat you to partake of the food freely and to wait patiently until you hear from me further."

"The Lord is good. He has not abandoned us. Praised be the name of the Lord!" murmured Rabinka.

"May God's grace be abundantly showered upon you," said Ona.

"See that the prisoners are well treated," was Donato's order to the jailor, as he left the oubliette.

"I will do as the Master of the Horse commands me," replied Orak, saluting the prince and returning to his post.

Chapter VI

That night the jailor carefully locked and bolted the prison doors and was about to start for his home, in a distant section of the city, when he was suddenly joined by a lithe, cowled figure, emerging almost wraithlike from the shadows of the dark street. With a quick, nervous motion he seized the officer's robe, pulled him to one side and thus addressed him:

"Sh—! Is Orak on his way home?"

"Ah, Neckko! Evil spirit of the night! Here you are again! Why is it you and your kind are always prowling about in the darkness? Is it to frighten well disposed citizens who wish to go peacefully on their way to enjoy their hard earned slumber? What do you seek of me? Speak!"

"Are the Christians safely locked in their cells?"

"Being a soothsayer and teller of fortunes, you should know these things without being obliged to seek information from me."

Neckko drew his shawl more tightly about his spare shoulders and nodded his head with a suppressed chuckle.

"Does Orak doubt my power? If so, let him

recall the days when the mighty Father of Waters, swollen to thrice its natural size, flooded the valleys and lowlands and how thousands of lives were saved by my timely warning. How should I know that the buffalo raiser and his companions are in trouble if I am unable to foretell events?"

His weird appearance and uncanny knowledge caused Orak to feel ill at ease. Neckko was regarded as the foremost fortune teller of Terrazan and held the high position of Counsellor to the King. Though not relishing his familiarity, the jailor recognized the necromancer's power only too well.

"The prisoners are safe," he replied.

"But they will escape if not closely guarded—they have powerful confederates on the outside."

The jailor started.

The soothsayer watched closely the effect of his statement. His quick perception enabled him to discern that Orak had no untoward knowledge.

"Did not Donato call upon the prisoners early in the afternoon?"

"He did."

"Did he not take an unusual interest in the girl?"

"He talked with her a long time and saved the life of her buffalo driver. Believe me,

Neckko, a moment more and I would have run him through with my spear."

"See! I knew it!" chuckled Neckko. "It is given to me to divine what transpires in the secret places. Answer me correctly, Orak, and I pledge you my honor you shall have nothing to fear. Tell me what Donato told the girl in the prison. If you inform me wrongly I shall know it. These Christian heretics desire to take away my livelihood by destroying my sacred profession. Crazy and fanatical, they even propose to abolish the sun sacrifice. A great effort will have to be made by the upholders of our cherished institutions to avert the catastrophe—we will have to fight with all the cunning of our power to save the empire. The new religion is well devised to appeal to the weak, the poor, the improvident and the unfortunate. By the use of their clever arguments its adherents may in time succeed in arousing the masses to a state of frenzy. No one will be safe—even jailors will be without employment. So from now on there must be no misunderstanding between the two classes: It is to be a war to the hilt and we cannot rest until the detestable dogma is stamped out of Terrazan and the empire of the Mound Builders. Listen, Orak, it is your duty to inform me of any secrets you may know concerning the Christians or their confederates. I will

advise the king at once regarding the state of affairs and urge him to extreme measures before it is too late. What was it Donato said to the daughter of Rabinka?"

"He entered her cell and talked a long time, but upon my word, Neckko, I know not the import of their conversation. I was not rash enough to stand idly by and listen to what was said by the Master of the Horse."

"I admire your caution, Orak; but you must have learned whether his intentions were friendly or antagonistic."

"He sent me for food for the prisoners and commanded me to treat them kindly."

"Is that all?"

"No; he took the hand of the old man in his, I remember that, and told the girl and her father to not worry, but to wait for his message."

"The evidence is conclusive," said Neckko. "It proves what I was telling: No one is safe—the schism has already reached the king's family. I had heard before that Donato's mother had influenced him to favor the Christians whose cause she has secretly espoused. I doubted it at the time, but evidently it is true. The king must not hesitate longer—there is no time to be lost. We shall see whether this unseen being whom they call God is more powerful than the god of our forefathers—the Wonderful, the Omnipo-

tent, the Everlasting and Never-Failing Light of the Heavens. Orak, I counsel you to be on your guard—do not let the prisoners escape, as the king will have need of them tomorrow."

With this abjuration Neckko stole into the shadows as silently as he had come and made his way to the royal palace of King Razak, a beautiful structure about a stone's throw from the rear of the temple. No pains had been spared by the artisans of Terrazan to make this residence one of splendor and delight. It was two stories in height and octagonal in form, surrounded by a peripteral of white fluted columns, each scapus crowned by the carved figure of some animal of the empire—a buffalo, bear, moose, mountain lion or wild goat, in life size, so that the complete row presented an interesting zoological collection. Around the building and about two rods from it was a lagoon or ditch with scarp and counterscarp over which two bridges led to doors at the east and west sides of the house. These bridges were always guarded by armed legionaries. The royal chamber occupied the northern half of the lower floor, two oriels projecting on either side beyond the king's throne which was situated at the center of the semi-circle formed by the outer wall. This room was gorgeous in its appointments and richly furnished with choice mats, furs, rugs and

tapestries. A large banquet table which had been specially provided for the feast days stood in the center, on which were palms, ferns and banks of rare and beautiful flowers. King Razak was holding high revel with a party of boon companions and courtesans.

Neckko was readily admitted to the palace and royal chamber by the guards, who recognized in him the most influential person in the empire, aside from the king. At a glance he perceived the character of the entertainment in progress, which was only another of the drunken debaucheries lately indulged in to excess by the king and his court. Empty decanters and gourds scattered about on the table and floor attested to the liberal quantity of wine and wahpoo that had been provided for the occasion;—and already many of the participants were noisy and demonstrative, indulging in vulgar and obscene dances and singing and chattering like parrots.

The soothsayer rapidly made his way to the king's side and addressed the monarch without ceremony or hesitancy:

“I fear the time is ill chosen, My Lord, for merriment and pleasure when the empire is in danger.”

The king, himself partially intoxicated, turned a stupid and quizzical look at his counsellor.

“Ah, Neckko, what fantasy has your imagina-

tion conjured up now to spoil our sport? See how gay and happy all the people are. Come, stop your scolding and fretting and join the merrymakers. Danger? Danger to the empire, you say? Fie, on such ranting! There has never been more security than exists at the present time. All our enemies have been vanquished and peace reigns throughout the land. I have the finest army ever marshalled under the banners of the Sun, ready to do my bidding at a moment's call. Danger! Stop making me laugh, Neckko. Go down into the crowd, select one of my pretty dancing girls and enjoy yourself to the limit."

"I have no desire to make you laugh, My Lord; neither have I any inclination to make a laughing stock of my noble profession. The moments are precious and there is too much at stake for me to waste my time here. We must crush the Christians or your kingdom will be lost—even your vast army cannot save it. Donato has conspired to release those sent to prison."

This startling statement had the effect of partially sobering King Razak. He rubbed his eyes and gaped at the soothsayer.

"Have you any proof that Donato has been plotting in the interest of the Christians?"

"You know I am not given to misrepresenta-

tion, Oh, King Razak; and least of all would I bring such an accusation against a member of your household without unquestioned evidence."

"Tell Donato to come to me at once," said the king, summoning a messenger.

"The Christians are becoming more audacious every day," continued Neckko. "Already they permeate all parts of the empire. The government is unsafe as long as their prophets are allowed to go the length and breadth of the land spreading their heretical doctrine. The ideas they inculcate regarding a reward after death for those who are kind, meek and holy upon earth, are peculiarly enchanting to the foolish and credulous. I am informed that even Queen Lilia has succumbed to their devices. She finds fault that Ona, the daughter of Rabinka, is to be sacrificed, does she not?"

"Neckko, nothing seems to escape your observation. The queen and I have had several arguments touching upon the fate of the prisoners. She is very much opposed to the execution of the girl."

"Naturally; being one with her, she will go any length. It is she who has poisoned the mind of your son."

At this juncture the messenger entered and bowing to King Razak said: "Your Royal Highness, Donato departed on his charger in the

middle of the afternoon, saying he would not be back until tomorrow."

"Strange he should leave the city at this time, and without my permission," said the king. "I wonder what he is up to?"

"Summon the queen," straightway suggested Neckko; "and delay not, My Lord—she can tell you more about the Christians than anyone else."

"Do you mean that she, too, has joined our enemies? Neckko, such a misfortune cannot be possible. But you have never yet deceived me and as I have had my own misgivings of late, I shall follow your advice."

Thus speaking, the king turned to the messenger and added:

"Tell Queen Liliah to come to me at once. I shall find out the whole truth about this matter."

The queen's apartments were in the upper part of the royal palace and in response to the summons of her sovereign, she soon appeared, attended by two maids-in-waiting, and humbly bowed before the throne.

"Where is Donato?" demanded the king curtly.

"Not knowing, I cannot tell you, My Lord," replied the queen unperturbed.

"Have you advised him to free the Christians imprisoned in the oubliette?"

"We have had no conversation regarding the matter, but I trust they will not be injured."

"See!" exclaimed Neckko, under his breath—"I told you she was in league with them."

"The sect to which they belong is a menace to the government!" thundered the king; "and hereafter all Christians discovered in my realm shall be proscribed."

The feast being momentarily interrupted, the revellers gathered around the throne, and at this declaration of their champion, burst into vociferous and repeated applause.

"Your words are worthy of a great ruler and prophet, Oh, Noble King!" exclaimed Neckko.

"And furthermore," continued Razak, encouraged by the approval of his boon companions and enraged at the opposition of his queen; "the daughter of the impious Rabinka shall be offered up tomorrow on the second day of the feast, rather than to wait until the third, if those present so desire. What say you to this proposal?"

Shouts of "Bravo!" "Long live the king!" "Kill her!" "Kill her!" "Death to all Christians!" greeted the statement and echoed loudly through the palace.

"Good, it shall be done! Let the heralds so announce," said King Razak, bowing in assent.

Queen Liliah arose quietly and withdrew to her apartments. Immediately dispatching a secret messenger to her son, Donato, she informed him of the king's decision and asked him to do what he could to save the Christian girl.

Neckko, chuckling over his acumen, departed to devise other means for persecuting the followers of St. Ojoban.

Filling his cup, King Razak quaffed its contents and requested his guests to resume their revelry. Amid scenes of disorder and excess, freely interspersed with abuse and ridicule for members of the new creed, the royal debauchery continued until the early hours of the following day.

Chapter VII

The news that Ona was to be offered up on the altar of sacrifice on the second day of the feast rapidly spread throughout Terrazan. The fact that she was a Christian girl and the daughter of a wealthy buffalo raiser added a two-fold interest to the execution and the coming event soon became the sole topic of conversation.

As the fatal hour approached, an eager and unprecedented throng crowded into the temple. The king and queen with great eclat entered and took their customary places, surrounded by their personal equipages in gilt trappings and gorgeous costumes. The wealth of the city occupied the places of greatest vantage, while a multitude of spectators filled the balance of the building and overflowed into the streets and sidepaths.

Just before the sun reached its zenith a cavalcade bearing the victims drew up to the temple steps and the unfortunate girl and babes were carried and deposited in the chancel by six stalwart legionaries. At the same instant the blare of a trumpet announced that all was in readiness for the ceremony. The incense rising

from the huge brasiers and the low chanting of the vestal choir as the officials moved about preparing their golden urns and accessories for the slaughter, produced a weird and solemn effect. The atmosphere grew heavy and oppressive and the pagan worshippers sat with transfixed eyes watching the details of the proceedings.

At a signal from the high priest, an assistant lifted one of the infants in his arms, displayed it high in the air so all might be able to view it, and laid it upon the altar of sacrifice. The acolytes ascended with cloths, pans and flesh-hooks, and the dagger was put into the hands of the executioner.

While this was taking place two figures in black were seen to enter the portcullis below and kneel humbly at the foot of the temple steps. One was the woman to whom Geroth had spoken on his way to the dungeon the day before; the other, her companion and sister in woe, was the mother of the infant about to be sacrificed.

As they knelt, the first one leaned over and whispered to her comrade:

"He said that the true God does not believe in human sacrifice—that if one has faith in Him, all will be well. Why not pray to this new God of the Christians? Perhaps He will help us."

"Nothing that we can do now will be of any avail," replied the other. "Don't you see that the

high priest already has the dagger in his hand? Even now he is whetting it on the edge of the altar stone. All will be over in a little while. It is useless to rely on a vain hope. We must be resigned to our fate. Oh, the cruelty of those in power," she sobbed, hiding her face in her hands.

"I feel that he told the truth," insisted the first. "There was so much determination and earnestness in his tones that I believe something will yet intervene."

As she uttered the words, a chorus of "Oh's" arose from the people near her. Looking around she saw a shaggy, herculean figure brush by the guards, gain the temple steps and rapidly ascend.

"There he is now!" she screamed, excitedly, shaking her companion and pointing at the strange figure. "Praise God! He is going to save our children!"

The other looked in the direction indicated.

A skin-clad man of giant stature, evidently bent on preventing the executions, was racing up the great stairway at breakneck speed.

Up, up, he went, without pause, glancing neither to the right nor to the left.

"He's too late—he isn't able to save the child—I know he cannot reach the altar in time for that," said the mother of the infant.

"Don't despair," said the other, "he has nearly reached the top!"

In his race against death, Geroth was now bounding up the stairs, three steps at a time. To the two women below, every moment was one of stupendous importance—a single second might mean failure or success. With a final bound, the giant cleared the last step and reached the chancel railing. Blocked, he ran hither and thither, searching for an opening.

"There is no further hope," said the mother; "he'll have to return—the chancel railing has barred the way."

In other parts of the temple the spectators were too astonished by the strange occurrence to immediately grasp its significance. Even King Razak, believing some important message was about to be delivered to the high priest, sat immobile. Queen Liliah bent forward to better view the bottom of the staircase, as though expecting someone to follow in the wake of the strange figure, and every now and then she cast anxious glances toward the portcullis.

The high priest lifted his dagger to deliver the fatal blow. A deathly silence fell upon the vast multitude. Every eye was strained, every nerve was tense. Breathlessly the excited throng watched the gleaming knife raised high above the assassin's head.

The gateway in front of the altar had been

securely bolted, and Geroth, finding no other way to enter the chancel, placed his hands on top of one of the posts and with a quick, light spring, bounded over the railing. Uttering a low, muffled roar he dashed up the short flight of steps to the altar.

The hand of the high priest was just on the point of plunging the knife into his helpless victim, when he heard a commotion, paused an instant, and turned around.

The brief delay allowed Geroth time to reach his goal. He seized the monster and raising him high above his head, projected him bodily over the parapet of the temple. Pushing the acolytes and other attendants aside, he lifted the bound form of Ona and placing it upon his shoulder, unbolted the gate of the chancel railing and started down the steps.

Auditors in all sections of the temple rose wildly in their seats. King Razak, realizing that a bold attempt at escape was being made, stamped in rage and called his guard. Officers and legionaries reached for their weapons and started in pursuit of the fugitive.

But Geroth, agile as a panther, bounded down the stairway and left his pursuers in the rear.

A hundred legionaries and guardsmen crowded around the bottom of the steps to block his way.

He was about to be overwhelmed and borne down, when Donato appeared on his charger and commanded the soldiers to stand aside.

Stooping and taking Ona in his arms, he greeted Geroth whom he directed to a charger that was being held in readiness. Wheeling and telling the giant to follow, he gave his horse a sharp cut with his whip and galloped through the gate of the Akrifal.

The calamitous death of the high priest caused pandemonium to reign in the sanctuary. His associates and their helpers rushed down the private passageway behind the altar to recover the body, forgetful of all else. In a brief space of time the chancel became deserted and Queen Liliah ordered two of her most trusted maids to procure the infants for the sacrifice and deliver them to their mothers. In the general confusion that existed, the deed was accomplished without attracting suspicion.

When the maids returned, the queen sank back in her seat, the trace of a smile playing about her features.

The king, unable to control his anger at the escape of Ona, cursed Rabinka's buffalo driver, whom he dubbed a "swineherd," and ordered his entire guard in pursuit.

But Donato and Geroth, riding the fastest and most powerful steeds in the empire, were in no

danger of capture. Turning to the left, they made a half circuit of the city and galloped down the roadway leading to the river. All gates, except the Akrifal, being ordered closed during the hour of sacrifice, it was impossible for the king's forces to intercept them. Upon reaching the Father of Waters they turned to the north. Skirting the thick growth of evergreens along the brink and following the river's course for several miles the party proceeded down a narrow trail leading to a deep, broad cavern in a bank of oolite formation. This secluded retreat, known as the Cave of Phantoms, had been selected as a meeting place for the Christians in the neighborhood of Terrazan, and here it was that St. Ojoban met his followers.

Ona, having fainted while being taken to the altar of sacrifice, was still in a state of semi-consciousness. The girl's fatigued condition compelled the travelers to dismount before reaching their destination, and they chose for their rendezvous a fragrant glade, midway between the river and the cave.

In a joyous mood, nature had here limned a masterpiece of fine detail. A wealth of flowers carpeted the sylvan bower and songbirds of many hues flooded the air with spirited and entrancing melodies. It was one of those warm autumn afternoons when all wild things of the forest are

exuberant with the joy of living. Squirrels clattered, partridges drummed and wild turkeys gobbled.

Ona was carried and made comfortable on a bed of ferns, dried leaves and moss.

Donato obtained water from a bubbling spring in the vicinity, and Geroth gathered roots and herbs from which he concocted a stimulating tea.

Raising Ona's head gently, Donato poured some of the beverage between her lips. In a few moments she opened her eyes.

Looking wildly around and seeing only her two rescuers she exclaimed:

"Where is my father? He hasn't been left alone to perish, has he?"

"You shall see him soon," replied the prince. "I placed him in the hands of friends and he is now waiting for us at the cavern."

Then he explained how he had gone to one of his military camps the day before to prepare his men for any eventuality, when the message came from his mother. He immediately departed for the oubliette to have the prisoners released from custody, but had arrived too late—the legionaries had already taken her away. Finding that Geroth had made his escape and was in pursuit of her captors, he ordered his men to escort her father to the Cave of Phantoms while he himself hurried

to the temple to assist her devoted servant whose heroism prevented her execution.

Rubbing her eyes, Ona listened in wonderment to Donato's recital.

"God bless you both for what you have done," was all she could say.

"Had it not been for Donato's timely arrival," replied the servant, "neither you nor I could have escaped. He deserves all the credit for what has been accomplished."

"That is always your way of looking at it—you unselfish fellow. You have guarded and protected me so often, Geroth, that I utterly lack words to express my friendship and gratitude."

The giant's face lit up with a big, boyish grin, but he made no response.

Continuing, Ona said: "And this young man—almost a total stranger—how can I ever repay him for his gallantry and devotion?"

"A true soldier performs his duty regardless of reward," replied Donato. "It has been a great joy to me to take the part I have this afternoon. I would not exchange places with the king himself."

Smiling upon her companions, Ona sank back and fell into a deep and refreshing sleep.

Geroth nodded his satisfaction and began planning for supper. Borrowing Donato's bow and quiver of arrows, he left the glade.

The prince busied himself collecting faggots for a campfire, kindling it by means of a flint contrivance he always carried.

Geroth reappeared shortly, proudly displaying a hare and turkey, which he skillfully dressed and proceeded to broil before the fire.

As the game was being cooked, Donato stretched himself out on a grassy plot for a much needed repose. Geroth, watchful and indefatigable, sat up near the fire and turned the meat.

When Ona and Donato awoke the stars were shining brightly overhead and the air was filled with an appetizing odor. "It's thoroughly done and more than enough for all," said Geroth gleefully. "Gather around and see what an expert cook I am."

"You're an expert at everything you undertake," answered Ona. "And I don't believe there is anything you cannot do."

After resting and regaling themselves, the adventurers carefully extinguished their fire. As the embers were dying out, subdued voices were heard along the nearby pathway.

"The Christians are on their way to the cavern," said Donato. "Let us join them."

Mounting their horses, they reached the cave after a brief journey.

A large crowd had already assembled and many

of the worshippers could be seen upon their knees in the semi-darkness, invoking and praying to the Most High, for St. Ojoban was conducting a novena for the safety of Ona.

When it was learned that the girl had been rescued and was in their midst, the voices of all present were raised in praise to God for her delivery.

Rabinka hurried to the entrance of the cave upon hearing the news and clasped his daughter in his arms as she dismounted. He was thanking Donato and Geroth for their heroic behavior when St. Ojoban, tall, patriarchal and glorified, came forward with upraised hands and blessed the trio that had so narrowly escaped the soldiers of King Razak. A halo hovered above his head as he spoke to those around him. His expression was so kind and his message so full of love and compassion that instinctively his followers were drawn to him and eagerly hung upon his every word.

Willing hands assisted Ona to an alcove at one side of the cave, where she could rest easily and at the same time listen to St. Ojoban's discourse.

Donato was greatly moved by the appearance and demeanor of the evangelist and sought Ona's retreat to tell her of his admiration for the apostle.

"But you aren't going!" she said, as he started

toward the entrance of the cave. "You must remain here and hear him preach. I beg of you to wait until after the sermon."

"Important affairs make it imperative for me to return to Terrazan at once," replied the prince.

"Nothing can be so important as your soul's salvation," pleaded the girl. "Please stay with us, and may God's word so impress you that you will be persuaded to become a Christian."

St. Ojoban had taken his position on a dais at the far end of the cave and was beginning to expound the scriptures.

The others in the grotto turned attentively toward him.

Donato reached out his hand and pressing Ona's whispered:

"For your sake, I will remain and hear what he has to say."

The blood surged to the maiden's temples, adding a supreme touch of beauty to her charming complexion.

"You must do it for your own sake, as well," she murmured, returning the pressure of his hand and holding it tightly.

Donato was thrilled with passion and pleasure. Though absorbed in the extraordinary sermon, his thoughts continually reverted to the beautiful creature beside him, whom he contemplated with ever increasing admiration.

St. Ojoban, never hesitating in his speech nor lacking for words, with great fervor, eloquence and power held his auditors spell-bound by the magic of his oratory as he delivered the new dispensation and preached the simple gospel of Christ. Taking for his text the Savior's words: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," he preached a sermon at once so forceful, Christlike and sincere that the cavern was permeated with the Holy Spirit and none attempted to resist its sanctifying influence. He began by relating the story of the creation; then he described the deluge; and finally dwelt at great length on the death and resurrection of the Redeemer. His message brought conviction to the hearts of sinners, and peace and hope to the weary and oppressed. Repeatedly he warned the people that no government would or could endure unless founded upon the teachings introduced by Jesus of Nazareth, which were practical and necessary in a material as well as spiritual sense.

When the apostle ceased speaking many of his listeners were in tears, sinners in all parts of the catacomb publicly unburdened their souls, praying for divine grace and guidance; while scores of converts knelt humbly in long rows before him. Numberless cripples and invalids crowded about him with outstretched hands, asking and begging him to make them whole; men, women and chil-

dren fought with each other for the mere privilege of touching his garment.

Passing among the people he extended his arms and healed the sick; cured the cripples, whom he commanded to throw away their crutches, and restored sight to those who were blind; simultaneously striving to impress upon his hearers the greater miracle of healing the soul, which was the supreme purpose of Christ's gospel.

Thus he continued in his ministry until not one in the whole assembly but raised his voice in praise and thanksgiving to the Almighty.

Donato was inspired and enthused by the new interpretation. Marveling over the phenomena manifested through the apostle, he could no longer deny the saving grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Thoroughly convinced that Christianity was the only true faith, and feeling more than ever his growing attachment and affection for Ona, the Master of the Horse definitely resolved to cast all his influence and power on the side of the new religion.

Not yet prepared to make his intentions known to the girl, he sought an interview with the apostle. The latter informed him that Christ came to bring righteousness, peaceably if possible, but by the sword if necessary, and assured him that his arms would be blessed if raised against sin and God's enemies.

Thus fortified, and thinking Ona safe from harm, Donato bade her a hasty farewell and without further delay proceeded back to Terrazan to prepare for the struggle that he knew was inevitable and near at hand.

Chapter VIII

When King Razak's returning legionaries informed him that the Christian prisoners, through the assistance of Donato, had eluded their pursuers, his anger knew no bounds. He strode about the temple, roaring at his menials and denouncing all those who showed the least sign of sympathy for the people he was persecuting. Among the first to feel the effects of his wrath was Queen Liliah, who, in her enthusiasm at seeing Ona escape, had inadvertently turned to the king with the remark that perhaps the God of the Christians was powerful enough after all to save his followers.

Had she been able to apply a match to a powder magazine, the explosion could not have been more sudden nor pronounced than the king's retort:

"He has not the power to save them, nor anybody who interferes in their behalf. No doubt you have influenced Donato in his actions today; but your efforts shall not avail. In this kingdom my will is the supreme law and you are warned not to say anything favorable to the traitors hereafter, if you wish to maintain your present position!"

Queen Liliah well know the temper of her husband. Rather than further aggravate him at this time, when, in his excited state she felt her arguments would only be thrown away, she wisely determined to withhold her opinions and wait for a favorable opportunity to act.

Neckko, coming under the king's observation shortly afterwards, was summoned to his master's side. This unscrupulous trickster, having the monarch's entire confidence, escaped altogether his sarcasm and wrath. Indeed, he was addressed kindly and asked for advice.

"Neckko, my men cannot find the fugitives," he said. "Have you the power to divine their whereabouts?"

"I have not studied the stars and signs of the heavens in vain, Oh, King Razak. By consulting the constellations we obtain all knowledge and wisdom. The Mighty Hunter has pointed out to me the hiding place of the Christians: A league along the Father of Waters, in the direction of the Great Bear. There in the depth of the earth will be found those you seek."

"Have done with all nonsense, Neckko—I am in no mood for jesting. I seek not the dead but the living; how, then, can they be in the depth of the earth as you maintain?"

"The constellations are to be depended upon, Oh, Mighty Sovereign. Doubt not my ability as

an astrologer. The signs reveal unmistakingly that the Christians will be praying tonight in the Cave of Phantoms and can easily be captured if the king's forces are immediately set in motion."

"I beg my counsellor's pardon for having expressed my doubt," humbly replied the ruler. "He is too great a prophet and seer to be deceived. There shall be no delay, Neckko; and my faithful servant shall reap a rich reward when the soldiers return with their prey."

"I ask but one favor for delivering the heretics into your hands," answered the soothsayer.

"And that is?"

"That I be allowed to name the manner in which they shall be punished."

"If you have knowledge of a surer and more effective method than I have designed, I am willing to grant your request; but remember, Neckko, they must be dispatched and without delay."

"My Lord, your decision is an excellent one; but in order to set as great an example as possible by the proposed punishment, you must acknowledge that the more of your subjects that can see the fate of the Christians the better."

"Quite right, Neckko, and for that very reason my intentions are to have them executed on the altar of the temple where the entire population of Terrazan can view the spectacle. No 'swineherd' will be able to rescue them this time."

"But such a procedure will be impossible in the temple—there are too many of them."

"Only three, as I recall it."

"Three hundred, at least, My Lord. The Cave of Phantoms has long been the secret meeting place of the idolaters and there they assemble nightly to listen to the teachings of their prophet. He and all his converts must be captured tonight and brought to Terrazan. Assemble them tomorrow, My Lord, on the third day of the Feast of the Sun, on the Plain of Arris, southeast of the city, and cause them to be trampled to death by buffaloes. The herds are feeding near by in great numbers and can be stampeded in any direction. Oh, King Razak, is this not a thorough and glorious manner of exterminating the enemies of the empire?"

The monarch was astounded. Although extremely cruel and tyrannical, his hard heart was repelled momentarily by the inhuman proposal. He stood stupefied, then, after a pause, said thoughtfully to his Counsellor:

"I did not think there were so many. Sit down, Neckko, let us talk it over frankly."

Neckko seated himself on an artistic leopard skin rug near the throne. King Razak looked anxiously into his face and inquired in an earnest voice:

"Neckko, do you really think we would be justified in ordering a wholesale execution of the Christians?"

"We will make a big mistake, My Lord, if we fail to suppress them. But what has prompted the question? Can it be that you have been listening to the mawkish twaddle of irresponsible advisers?"

"No, no, Neckko, not that; but your bold suggestion has made me fear that possibly conditions might become worse instead of better, if our persecutions are too severe."

"Conditions will become worse for us, My Lord," replied the Counsellor, "unless you crush the Christians at once. My program is a mild one compared to theirs. It is in fact the only recourse left. Do not haggle over trifles," he advised, rising to his feet. "Act immediately and destroy this obnoxious growth, root and branch, once and for all, before it destroys you."

All the fears and anxieties of King Razak were put to rest by the assurances of his trusted friend.

"Neckko, your ingenuity cannot be surpassed," he declared, patting him on the shoulder. "I clearly realize the grandeur of your program and will allow it to be carried out according to your suggestions. The details of the stampede shall be left in your hands and my soldiers will be in-

structed to follow your orders. The heralds can announce the event as soon as the Christians are captured. Is that to your liking?"

"Most Noble King," replied the necromancer, with a low conge, "I can find no words to express my gratitude. My only means of thanking you will be in services well rendered. Not a thing shall be left undone to properly safeguard our interests. Tomorrow's sun shall shine with renewed splendor on the glory of Terrazan."

Immediately following the interview, King Razak summoned his generals in conference, superseded Donato as Master of the Horse by his jailor Orak, and commanded four divisions of cavalry with accompanying archers, spearmen and charioteers to begin a forced march on the Cave of Phantoms.

Arriving there, they found several hundred Christians on their knees, praying and singing, and prepared to welcome their enemies rather than to oppose them.

No resistance was offered to the demands of King Razak's generals and all the inmates of the cavern were accordingly formed in line of march and driven ahead of the imperial army like cattle to the slaughter. Mothers with babes at their breasts; aged men with stooped shoulders and trembling limbs; little children scarcely able to walk—all alike had to march to the crack of the

whip. Those who lagged behind were prodded and kicked by the brutal soldiery.

In this crisis Ona vied with St. Ojoban in ministering to the flock. Like angels of mercy these two—one, young, beautiful and radiant in her new found faith; the other, resourceful, benevolent and seasoned through years of service to his Master—were unremitting in their efforts to keep up the spirits of their companions who in spite of their persecution marched to their doom, singing, rejoicing and praising God that they could die for His sake.

Never for once did Ona lose sight of her father. Whether passing through the line to speak a word of cheer to some weary mortal, or hurrying to St. Ojoban for a brief consultation, she ever and anon returned to her parent to offer encouragement and assistance.

But the aged Rabinka had long since passed his days of endurance and was now physically unequal to the task before him. His gait grew slower and slower; he staggered and lagged behind and was at last obliged to support himself on Geroth's arm. Even with his servant's aid he was unable to make further progress.

One of the legionaries, seeing the old man's plight, struck him a savage blow on the shoulder with a machette, drawing the blood.

"Fall in line!" he shouted. "An old 'long head' like you, should be able to keep up with women and children."

Rabinka, already exhausted, was overcome by the blow. Releasing Geroth's arm, he stood still for a moment and then tottered and fell prostrate.

Ona ran up and bent over her father, while Geroth fled to St. Ojoban, crying:

"Oh, Na-na Bo-sho! Come, quickly! They have killed my master. They have murdered your comrade Rabinka!"

The evangelist immediately followed Geroth to the place where the buffalo raiser was lying in the dust. They reached the spot just as the legionary raised his spear to give him a final thrust.

"Hold!" shouted St. Ojoban, raising his hand. "Injure not another hair of his head."

Forthwith the soldier's arm fell palsied at his side and his spear dropped to the ground.

Touching Rabinka on the shoulder, St. Ojoban exclaimed:

"In the name of Christ, the Redeemer, I make thee whole. Arise, good friend, and follow me!"

Rabinka straightway arose and smiling upon his comrades resumed his journey with youthful vigor.

The legionaries, nonpulsed at the strange event,

whispered one to another. "This man has an unnatural power. We will do well not to molest him." Thereafter they showed more kindness, refraining somewhat from their brutality during the rest of the march.

On the forenoon of the following day the procession reached the Plains of Arris, southeast of Terrazan, where the prisoners were huddled together under the directions of Neckko, the soothsayer, preparatory to being crushed to death by a sea of wild bisons driven upon them.

Ona thought often of her rescuer of the day before and wondered if he would continue to fight in her behalf. She hardly dared believe that the late Master of the Horse—the king's own son—could care for her—a member of the despised creed; and yet she knew she loved him. How she rejoiced when St. Ojoban told her that Donato had promised to become a Christian.

"Oh, if he could only be converted before my eyes," she said to herself. "Then, even if it is my lot to perish as a martyr, I could die happy."

Many similar inspirations crossed her mind while undergoing with her friends the trying ordeal on the Plain of Arris; and frequently her lips moved in prayer for him who now occupied so large a place in her affections.

Chapter IX

Donato, after leaving the Cave of Phantoms, returned to Terrazan by a circuitous route, and thereby avoided his father's soldiers. Concealing his charger in an old abandoned shed, he disguised himself as a shepherd and entered the gate of the Akrifal unrecognized by the guards. As soon as he was within the city limits he made his way to the royal palace. Throwing a pebble against the lattice of his mother's window, Queen Liliah, who was on the lookout, dispatched one of her maids-in-waiting with orders to the guards to admit the visitor.

When Donato was safely inside the palace the queen clasped him in her arms.

"I am more than proud of my gallant son," she said exultantly. "No mother could have been happier than I, when I witnessed your splendid heroism in saving the Christian girl."

"Had it not been for Geroth, I fear I would have failed in the attempt," replied Donato.

"What a marvelous creature he is!" exclaimed the queen with added enthusiasm. "Such arms and muscles! I really believe him more powerful

than the largest bison I have ever seen. He is truly a Montiguán and worthy of our greatest admiration and praise. But how the king detests him! Had the poor fellow been captured he would have been torn limb from limb and no mercy shown. Of course you are aware, Donato, how your father is disturbed by the alarming growth of Christianity. I warn you, after your actions today, to keep out of his sight until his anger has subsided."

"I am delighted with the new religion," replied the prince; "especially since I have heard it explained by its friends. It possesses an appeal that cannot be resisted by intelligent beings. Life is far different under it—more meaningful, more earnest, more satisfying. With such a faith one can face any danger and overcome all obstacles. It makes men truly brave and a baser calumny was never uttered than the charge that it produces cowards. Mother, I am convinced that it is the inspired work of an All Ruling Power—the only Good, the only True. We must consecrate our lives to it."

"For some time, Donato, I have been favorably inclined towards the Christians, regardless of the king's violent opposition. I am therefore glad of the stand you have taken; but for your personal safety—for the good you may be able to ac-

complish hereafter—you must remain in hiding until after the Feast Days."

As Queen Liliah ceased speaking a herald's voice was heard in the street below announcing that the Christians had been captured in the Cave of Phantoms and would be trampled by buffaloes on the Plain of Arris the following day, according to a proclamation by King Razak.

Donato looked up, his face suddenly ashen.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "the Cave of Phantoms is where I conducted Ona this afternoon for safety. She will be murdered with the others. I must do what I can to save her—there is no time to lose!"

"But, my child, you will only pay for your rashness with your life. Neckko, the soothsayer, under his royal commission as Counsellor to the King, is able to wind your father around his little finger like a thread upon a bobbin and now actually controls the affairs of the empire. He is bent on the extermination of the Christians and I beseech you not to interfere further at this time. Stay with me until the storm passes."

"I am still known as the Master of the Horse," replied Donato. "I can rally ten thousand loyal comrades from the nearby provinces on a day's notice. If I go at once I may be in time to save the prisoners. The king's legionaries are no match for my horsemen. Delay is dangerous and

duty plain. I cannot remain here and permit these people to perish without raising a hand in their defense. Pray for our cause. It is not possible for me to tarry longer."

Donato, despite his mother's protests, made his way to the door. Queen Liliah, contemplating his decision, was forced to admire his courage, and before he departed withdrew her objections.

"God be with you," she said at last. "You have my consent to enter this just fight. I will watch your fortunes from the window yonder. If you meet with reverses, I will carry the sun banner of the Montiguans and seek to stem the tide."

The two affectionately bade each other farewell after entering into a compact which was to have far-reaching results.

Donato, finding his charger unmolested where he had left it, set off for the nearest military post, where, upon his arrival, he dispatched several squads of his fleetest riders to the surrounding encampments to assemble his warriors. In these encampments, alternately, picked legions were always stationed, ready for any emergency.

In an impassioned appeal he addressed himself to his followers:

"Noble Comrades, in defense of our homes and of our country, I call upon you to gather tomorrow from the four quarters of the realm to drive

the king's forces from the Plain of Arris. Neckko, the soothsayer, has usurped the powers of government and seeks control of the entire nation. The king has too long listened to his evil counsels and has been betrayed. We must storm the citadel and restore the empire. Long live my brave horsemen of the plains! Long live the great Sun-God."

Never were soldiers so stirred as by this declaration. Never before was mobilization so quick and complete. Idolizing their brave young chieftain, they sprang to his assistance with the alacrity of trained and seasoned athletes. As if by magic thousands of gigantic troopers rallied around his standard and bore down upon the Plain of Arris.

* * * * *

Looking from her window the next day the queen saw the Christians from the Cave of Phantoms in a pathetic group southeast of the city, awaiting their martyrdom. She could hear their hymns of praise to the Most High as a gentle breeze wafted their voices in the direction of Terrazan.

Far away to the south she distinguished a narrow, black streak, faint and threadlike, against the blue of the horizon.

"What is it?" she said to herself, excitedly. "Can it be Donato and his horsemen, or the buffalo herds?"

Larger and larger grew the threadlike line until it resembled a field of dancing grain in the distance.

She strained her eyes in the brilliant light of the midday sun to determine the formation of the approaching line.

Louder and louder sounded the hymns of the kneeling Christians.

The advancing columns were closing in upon their helpless victims. Dust arose like cyclonic clouds in front of the charging hosts.

Queen Liliah shrank from the window in utter despair. She discerned through the veil of dust the low heads and shaggy manes of thousands of wild Monarchs of the Plains, bearing down like a mighty sea, wave upon wave, engulfing the Christians and completely hiding them from her view.

Chapter X

After the Christians had been driven far out on the Plains of Arris, to a point where escape would be quite impossible, their hands were tied behind them with thongs, according to the instructions of the King's Counsellor; the thongs in turn being attached to a long rope twisted around the victims and fastened at intervals to stout stakes pounded deeply into the ground, thus helplessly binding the captives together. Neckko had cunningly devised the scheme of spreading them out upon the plain in a double row as thinly as possible that the buffaloes in their mad rush could not avoid coming in contact with them.

St. Ojoban occupied a position near the center of the first line, facing the south—the direction from which the buffaloes were to be driven. The details were so arranged by the necromancer that the animals would sweep past the city in full view of the onlookers in the temple and upon the steps and walls.

Without bitterness nor words of complaint the apostle exhorted his followers to be of good cheer and to bravely face the fate in store for them.

"I have sown the seed as commanded," he said; "but it has fallen upon barren soil. It will yet blossom and bear fruit, but not in this day nor generation. The glory of Terrazan shall pass away—her sins and folly shall encompass her ruin; desolation and destruction shall fill the land; her tribes shall be divided and scattered; her villages laid waste and her power crushed. An alien race shall acquire her vast domains and the power of God shall be great and the glory of His son shall outshine the splendor of kings. As it was spoken of Jerusalem by the Lord, our Savior, so let it be said of Terrazan:

"O, Terrazan, Terrazan, thou that killest the prophets, and stoneth them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

"Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places."

A departing legionary, who had listened to the discourse, remarked:

"If your God is as powerful as you declare, let Him protect you from the buffaloes."

"We have nothing to fear from the dumb brutes—they are not our enemies," replied St. Ojoban. "Evil minded people are far more dangerous. For as the Master hath said: 'Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.'

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

"Blessed are they who have seen the Lord; but thrice blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

At that moment the sea of wild bisons, driven by Neckko's accomplices, hove into sight low on the southern horizon.

In another part of the line, to the apostle's

left, stood Ona and the faithful Geroth, the latter fretting under the tenacity of his thongs. He was using every effort to free himself and had succeeded in partially loosening the bands.

"There's no use, Geroth," counselled Ona. "Even if we could cut the ropes, we would be unable to escape—the city is closed against us and to flee out into the open would be as disastrous as to remain here. King Razak's soldiers have stampeded the buffaloes for the purpose of cutting us to pieces. I can see them in the distance."

"I've captured and tamed many of the prairie cows," replied the servant, tugging way. "If I were free and had an equal chance, I wouldn't be afraid of the whole herd."

Nearer and nearer approached the bisons, their hoof beats sounding like the roll of distant thunder.

The prisoners were upon their knees, praying and singing—the long, loose rope allowing sufficient freedom for that purpose. St. Ojoban stood in the center of his flock, tall, erect and imposing. Suddenly his thongs dropped to the ground and he raised his hands on high.

With lowered heads and snorting nostrils the frightened bison were tearing along the prairie, scattering particles of turf and raising clouds of dust.

While still a long distance from the Christians, to the amazement of the assembled hosts, they quickly divided into two far-flung columns, one deflecting to the right, and the other to the left of the kneeling Christians.

In vain did Neckko's guides and scouts strive to keep the herd intact. Shouting and cracking their whips they rode beyond the flanks of the dividing lines in an effort to force them together before it was too late.

The King's Counsellor, seeing his well laid plans about to be frustrated, rode swiftly among his men and frantically ordered them to close the gap. With undaunted courage his followers shot their arrows and threw spears and javelins into the sides of recalcitrant animals. Their horses reared upon their haunches as the riders, wildly waving their arms, rushed pell-mell against the diverging lines of the living stream.

But no human effort could cause the stubborn beasts to vary their course even the breadth of a hair. With a steady, headlong rush, they kept to their chosen paths, completely avoiding their intended victims and entirely defeating the wily soothsayer's designs.

When this was perceived by King Razak from his throne he became furious with disappointment and rage. He gave orders to his legion-

aries to attack the Christians as soon as the buffaloes were out of the way and commanded the men not to spare a single soul.

Geroth, by his continued exertions, had removed his fetters and also succeeded in freeing Ona. Bounding into the open, he set himself to the task of catching a bison on which the girl might make her escape.

Selecting one that had straggled out of the line, he blinded it with his goatskin hauberk and tripped it at the same instant with the aid of one of Neckko's stakes that he had jerked from the ground. The animal made several revolutions in the dust before it could recover, and seemed dazed and bewildered as it arose, giving Geroth time to seize Ona and seat her upon its back.

"But," protested the girl, as the powerful driver lifted her in his arms; "What of my father?—I cannot thus desert him!"

"Go!—For Donato's sake!" exclaimed the servant. "He loves you and will travel any distance to find you!—Leave your father to me!—There's no time to lose!"—

"I will tell Donato of your escape!" he shouted, as the bison bore her away.

On her father's domains in the west, Ona from childhood had been accustomed to riding in this

manner, and was therefore enabled to keep her mount. Realizing that she could be of no assistance to her friends, she clung to the buffalo's mane for dear life.

With the velocity of a tornado the buffalo herds swept past the city and converged beyond the kneeling Christians. As they disappeared over the rolling prairie, King Razak's legionaries filed out of the gate of the Akrifal and charged down upon the doomed and helpless band.

Simultaneously Donato's troopers, with the prince in command, came bounding to the aid of St. Ojoban and his followers.

Too late to save his friends, who were butchered in cold blood within sight of the populace of Terrazan, Donato nevertheless, by galloping ahead of his men, arrived in time to find Geroth, bleeding from many wounds but still alive, able to inform him that Ona, the one in whom he was most concerned—for whom he was willing to sacrifice, if need be, position, wealth and fame—to his great joy and consolation, had made her escape on the back of a bison.

After raising him to a more comfortable posture and hastily doing what he could to relieve the giant's suffering, Donato rejoined his troopers and ordered them forward to the charge.

The next instant a legionary sent up to dispatch

all Christians who still retained signs of life, ran his spear through the valiant Geroth, thus ending the career of one of the most illustrious heroes of the early faith. The noble plainsman perished as a true Christian martyr, by the side of St. Ojoban, and several hundred companions, while vainly striving to protect his friends.

The massacre of the Christians on the Plain of Arris was absolute and complete. No calamity of equal import had ever overwhelmed the members of any sect or religion. Clashing with the corrupt, ignorant and superstitious dogmas of the arrogant Sun Worshippers, the early converts incurred the enmity of those in the high places. Even as in the Old World, where persecution and torture were the first answer of the enraged pagans to the teaching of the Nazarene; so in ancient America violence and murder were employed in a vain effort to perpetuate a system that was displeasing and abominable in the eyes of the Almighty.

Donato fought gallantly at the head of his cavalry throughout the remainder of the afternoon, furiously attacking the legionaries and pursuing them with great courage, not quitting the field until the king's forces retired behind the walls of the city. Then turning, he galloped with all speed in the direction taken by Ona.

CHAPTER XI

From her position in the royal palace Queen Liliah had been unable to see the buffaloes divide and pass the Christians and therefore concluded that the latter had all been crushed.

When she recovered from her shock sufficiently to again look upon the Plain of Arris, Donato's troopers were fiercely driving the king's legionaries back into the city. She watched the rout with interest, endeavoring to catch a glimpse of her son, but nowhere could she descry the victorious commander. As the battle subsided and he did not appear upon the scene of action the thought obsessed her that he was among the slain.

Burning with resentment at the brutal massacre of the Christians and resolved to avenge her son, she boldly left the palace, defied the king's authority and called on all faithful Montiguans to rally to her standard.

There had never been complete harmony between the two divisions of the empire; petty jealousies existed, due to political and military favoritism, and many opposing customs made it difficult for the people to agree. Now that there

was an open breach between the respective leaders, the two factions rapidly divided and precipitated a national disintegration. Terrazan was soon in a turmoil; families were embroiled and street fighting became of common occurrence. To complete the work of ruin, fire broke out in dozens of places and as the feast days closed, the flames of the proud capital lit up the western skies. The population poured out of the gates of the city in constant streams and scattered over the nearby terrain. It was the beginning of the dissolution of the Mound Builder empire.

Queen Liliah's forces, consisting principally of Donato's cavalry, gathered east of the city and prepared to attack the imperial army that had intrenched itself on the Plain of Arris.

Though opposing the king's authority, the queen's soldiers were not, properly speaking, the champions of Christianity. Born Sun Worshipers, they detested the new religion as much as their opponents and undoubtedly would have gone as far as the others in persecuting its followers. They were in the fight purely as Montiguans, anxious to seize the reigns of government for selfish purposes.

The king's infantry, approximately ten thousand strong—including spearmen, archers and axmen—took positions behind newly constructed

earthworks and fortifications, three ancient mounds, the monarch Almedo's monuments to the sun, acting as bastions to the main rampart. Impatiently the loyal Sigourian troops awaited the attack of Queen Liliah's cavalry.

Precisely at midday the order to advance was given and the queen's troopers in splendid martial array, with glittering shields and balanced spears, charged the fortifications.

Showers of arrows fell upon their heads, wounding and killing scores of horses and men. Still the attacking hosts pressed forward, rising to the summit of the earthworks and sending their shafts at the enemy.

Bravely did Razak's men defend the top of the ridge. Giant forms with colossal sledges hacked at the horsemen and threw them tumbling backwards to the plain.

Ten times did the queen's men launch their furious assaults and as many times did the king's forces hurl them back.

Zanto, the foremost Montiguan general, at the head of a picked division, upon Queen Liliah's urgent appeal, made a desperate attempt late in the day to carry the field. Heroically he ascended the slope leading to the fortifications, dashed over the ramparts with his horsemen and cut his way

into the midst of his opponents. Quickly surrounded by the frantic Sigourians, his brave comrades perished to the last man as the victors surged onward over the breastworks. Zanto, severely wounded, alone escaped.

Queen Liliah desperately endeavored to stem the tide. Dashing among her cohorts she seemed endowed with superhuman abilities, shouting her orders and encouraging her men. But the task of achieving victory was beyond her power: she rallied one section of her line only to see other parts break and fall back in utter disorder; and at last the brilliant amazon, having lost fully one-half of her forces, gave up the unequal contest and ordered a retreat.

The king's losses during the engagement were almost as severe. The monarch himself was fatally wounded and his command turned over to Neckko his Counsellor.

The remnant of the Queen's army withdrew to the eastward where it was eventually augmented by thousands of her kinsmen and where she prepared to make a final stand.

Henceforward skirmishes and battles between Montiguans and Sigourians were of common occurrence in all parts of the country. In reality a war of extermination was in progress and it became the fashion for the victors to erect mounds

at the conclusion of a combat in honor of the event, either on the scene of the carnage or in some other desirable location. Under these mounds the soldiers buried their leaders, when killed in battle, or some other hero from among their fallen comrades. Often the mounds contained nothing more than a few relics of the encounter. It might even be that the eminence alone was considered a sufficient monument for the occasion and in that event held nothing more than the earth from which it was constructed. At other times ornamented pottery; articles of mica, silver, obsidian and porphyry; and other trophies and plunder that could not be carried away were interred. Some favorable localities contained collections of mounds, showing the number of victories won by those in control, the size of the pyramids indicating the relative importance of the battles.

Terrazan was in ashes, its population scattered and its ruler dead. To add to the general devastation, sickness, plagues and pestilences decimated the ranks of those who survived the fate of war.

Under these trying circumstances Neckko employed all the genius at his command to muster the loyal military strength of the dying empire for a decisive blow. With a vast horde of cavalry and footmen, ill-equipped and poorly provisioned, he began his march over plains, across rivers, and

through morasses and dense forests. At last he sighted the camp of the Montiguans who were waiting to accept battle behind immense and elaborately constructed mounds of animal formation, adopted by reason of their being sacred emblems and therefore the more likely to overcome and confound their enemies. Some represented serpents and fish; others alligators and turtles. Extensive fortifications were also constructed, by both sides, and many mounds erected for observation and signal purposes.

In the course of the next few months there were many attacks and counter-attacks in which thousands perished. Agriculture having been abandoned, it was impossible to secure the necessary food for the army. As a consequence famine and epidemics ravished the land and after a period of unrelenting hostilities both the Sigourians and the Montiguans found themselves practically annihilated.

Zanto, dissipated and madly infatuated with his brilliant queen, attempted to enter her tent one evening after dusk, but was detected and strangled by her faithful guards. Members of his clan took up the guage of battle and sought to avenge the death of their fallen comrade. Singling out their enemies, a hand-to-hand combat ensued which continued throughout the night. As the morning sun appeared above the

horizon it revealed a calamity appalling in its destruction and desolation. Hundreds of bodies covered the ground and the soil was drenched with blood.

Queen Liliah, brooding over her misfortunes, and determined not to become a vassal to her enemies, ordered several of her servants to cast her adrift over the Niagara Falls, where, in accordance to a dream and vision she had had, her voice could forever mingle with the thunder of the mighty waters in a protest against the barbarities inflicted upon the early Christians.

In the ranks of the opposition, mutinies and insurrections were of daily occurrence. The leading generals succumbed to intrigues and were succeeded by incompetent and licentious officers who fell out among themselves. Neckko was murdered in his bed, dragged through the streets and his body thrown from a projecting cliff.

From these disasters the Mound Builders could not recover. The idolatrous civilization of ancient America was swept away, part of its survivors emigrating southward to re-establish themselves in the more congenial climate of the tropics; while the remainder banded themselves together in tribes to roam the plains and forests of the north.

Under such a complete and absolute debacle it

might be thought that the Christian revelations made by St. Ojoban perished from the continent. But happily that untoward calamity did not occur. Like the tiny grain that leavens the whole loaf, the wonderful story, even under these adverse conditions, grew and spread until its precepts and doctrines reached to the remotest tribes.

Chapter XII

As nothing escaped the eyes of Neckko, he had observed Geroth when the latter placed Ona upon the back of the captured buffalo. Immediately several horsemen were ordered in pursuit, the soothsayer commanding them to conduct the girl to the "Place of Fishes," a village lying at the confluence of two small rivers in the direction the herd of bisons had taken, and there to commit her to the care of one of his confidantes and assistants—an old witch by the name of Bowiss.

The horsemen were not long in capturing Ona, as the buffalo she was riding limped from an injury sustained when it had fallen, and lagged far in the rear of its fellows. The maiden was bound and gagged and soon delivered into the hands of Bowiss who was cautioned to look carefully after the prisoner.

"She is a most important person," they informed her—"a direct hostage of King Razak."

The old woman was promised a liberal reward if she faithfully guarded the one intrusted to her care.

The witch's hands clutched involuntarily at the

thought of the price she was to obtain for her villainy—for a little remuneration she was willing to perform any act of treachery or deceit. Therefore with many a chuckle and hobble she directed the men to take Ona to a secluded room which she pointed out in the rear of her lodge, and instructed the kidnapers to assure their master that the girl would be well taken care of.

As he departed, the leader of the party handed Bowiss a scroll from Neckko which informed her that Ona was a Christian girl and for that reason particularly obnoxious to their cult and a fair target for any kind of persecution. The witch read the scroll and rubbed her hands with satisfaction. This wrinkled hag was a natural product of the superstitious beliefs and idolatrous training of the Mound Builder era. She was the personification of trickery and cunning and her glib tongue made her a dangerous antagonist. With large hooked nose and half-closed eyes, always peering into corners and crevices, or poking around in dark places with a long wand, she had all the appearance of a true wizard and enchantress and proved a worthy confederate of the renowned soothsayer. Together the two practiced sorcery to an inconceivable degree. The profession attained wonderful proficiency and influence in that age and its devotees openly concocted many murderous and far-reaching plots. All the

witch's venom was now turned upon Ona, against whom every circumstance seemed to conspire; but nevertheless the maiden remained unfaltering in her faith, devotion and duty.

The room in which she was incarcerated was a dark dungeon dug in a high bank at the back of Bowiss' hut, and here the witch frequently appeared in disguise to coerce or intimidate her.

Wearing the skin of a wolf she entered Ona's room one evening and told her that she was going to take her to the other end of the village for a little walk.

"I would rather stay here and pray," said the girl in alarm.

"Pray!" echoed Bowiss, with a sneer. "You are always on your knees praying to your unseen God. What good does it do you, I should like to ask?"

"God will answer my prayers and overcome your evil power in His own good time," replied Ona.

"You ought to be thankful that I feed you and keep you alive, you ungrateful hussy. I warn you to beware of the Sun's rays. I wouldn't dare take you out in the daytime, because if the Sun-god sees you, he will strike you dead for your heresy."

"I am not afraid of your threats, nor of the sun, Oh, Witch. Your works are those of darkness and deception. You and your kind cannot prevail against the laws of God. I advise you to renounce your evil ways and turn to the true faith, if you desire to be saved."

Bowiss was not placated by Ona's speech. On the contrary she flew into a passion and seizing the girl by the hand dragged her out of the house. Though skinny and decrepit, the hag was large of bone and possessed great strength.

Having previously informed her dupes and followers of the proposed promenade, many ruffians were lined up on either side of the narrow street, armed with beech switches, to strike Ona as she passed along. The poor girl was forced to run the gauntlet from her prison to the end of the street and back again, the witch following her in her wolf skin disguise and adding many a blow to those of the other tormentors. A phosphorescent substance fastened to the wolf's forehead emitted a faint light at intervals and contributed to the gruesomeness of the scene. When Ona finally returned to the witch's lodge she fell exhausted. Her body was bruised and torn from numberless gashes and cuts caused by the tough beech whips.

A few weeks later a little girl ran into Bowiss' hovel in the early evening to inform the hag that

her father and mother were very ill and that others in the neighborhood had been suddenly stricken by a strange and dangerous malady.

"That's the work of Onus," said the witch. "She's been on her knees conjuring and conniving until she has brought this misfortune down upon us. But I'll cure her of her tricks, depend on that. And it won't take me very long to do it, either," she affirmed, rapping on the floor with her cane.

"Just run home," she said to her visitor; "and tell your friends to come to me here that we may punish this wicked sorceress."

Before it was yet dark a crowd had congregated. Ona was led from the lodge, stripped of her clothing and tied to a tree with her hands above her head. Brush was piled high around her and she was solemnly informed that if she continued her work of perfidy she would be burned alive. Her denials were useless; in fact, no one would listen to what she said. After taunting and ridiculing her the greater part of the night, her bands were loosened and in a fainting condition she was pushed back into her prison.

Many other torments and persecutions were administered in the days that followed to make Ona forsake her religion; but with true Christian fortitude she bore it all bravely, continued in her daily devotions to her Savior, and never gave up

the hope that some day she would again meet Donato. The words of St. Ojoban were her constant consolation. His wonderful revelations of the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, was a transcendent message that kept her firm of purpose and proof against all machinations.

It was while these things were happening in the Place of Fishes that Neckko started on his great military campaign. Passing the village en route to the east, he made a hurried visit to the sorceress.

"The girl is the queerest person I have ever seen," complained Bowiss. "If all the Christians are as incomprehensible as she, it is indeed well to have them exterminated. Take her off my hands, I pray; and send me no more of her ilk. She is impervious to all my charms and potions.

"Despair not, Divine Enchantress," replied the soothsayer, who had seen Donato when the latter left the Plain of Arris in pursuit of Ona. "She is in league with our enemies and must be kept a prisoner until I return. Here is silver for you," he added, throwing her a nugget; "and I shall make you wealthy upon my return, if I find you faithful to your trust."

The witch needed no other encouragement.

"When you return, Oh, Gallant Knight, even if it be not before the Sun has traveled the sky a thousand times in its diurnal flight, you shall find me here at the Place of Fishes ready to deliver yonder wretch into your hands."

With effusive praise for her promised devotion to his cause, Neckko bade the sorceress adieu and proceeded with his columns.

For many months Ona remained in seclusion, gradually gaining more and more freedom as stories arrived telling of the eversion of the country and the failure of Neckko's undertaking. She never lost an opportunity to tell the story of the Redeemer and in spite of the witch's watchfulness her message and cheerful words penetrated into many neighboring huts and hovels. One of the persons she succeeded in converting was a dwarf who did errands and chores for Bowiss. Though extremely small of stature and deformed, this mite of humanity was exceptionally bright and intelligent and performed numerous acts of kindness for the imprisoned girl. Under pretexts of various kinds he would often slip around the witch unnoticed and carry food and delicacies to Ona's room. "Bossu," as he was known, also kept her informed regarding the news of the village and such other matters as came to his ears. Ona in turn gave him much spiritual

instruction and he became a devoted Christian; but to prevent his eviseration he carefully concealed the fact from old Bowiss.

On a one day gave the homuncule a number of butterfly stones to distribute secretly among the Christians of the village. Bossu tucked them under his arm and was about to leave the lodge when Bowiss chanced to catch sight of one of the emblems.

"Hold on, let me see what you have," she said, seizing him by the shoulders.

"Only a few amulets," replied the dwarf, trying to wriggle out of her grasp.

"Charms of the Christians!" exclaimed Bowiss, pulling them away from him. Bossu made an attempt to snatch them out of her hand and in so doing knocked them to the floor.

"You little scoundrel!" shrieked the witch, picking them up. "Don't ever let me see you around here again with any more of these infamous objects. They are evil omens and you ought to be thrashed."

"You can't thrash me," retorted Bossu, sticking out his tongue and darting through the door.

"Just wait till I catch you," said Bowiss angrily. Breaking the butterfly stones into small bits with

a maul, she carried them to an open field and threw them in a heap upon the ground.

Returning, she found Bossu standing innocently by the side of the house. As she entered the door he ran swiftly in front of her, holding in his hand a stout string, one end of which he had fastened to a nearby sapling. Giving the string a quick jerk, he tripped the old hag, who plunged forward and sprawled out full length on the grass.

Rising and straightening herself up, she shook her fist with rage.

"Oh, if I ever get hold of you again, I'll make you jump for this," she said, grinding her teeth.

Hobbling after Bossu with her cane, she tried her best to overtake him. The dwarf ran just fast enough to keep out of her clutches and at the same time lead her on. Farther and farther he drew her from her lodge, over fallen trees, stumps and knolls. Every time she endeavored to seize him, he would turn quickly, make a grimace and slip away. The witch shook her cane threateningly and stumbled along in desperation.

Bossu took a final stand at the edge of a deep hole, which had been excavated to obtain pottery clay. The witch drew near, determined to capture the homuncule and give him a severe whipping.

Bossu allowed her to approach within a few

feet, but as she grabbed for him, dexterously stepped aside. The impetus of her movement caused her to topple into the hollow where she became a prisoner.

Paying no attention to her outcries, Bossu ran back to Ona and shouted joyously:

"Old Bowiss is where she can't bother us any more. I fooled her that time. She fell in a hole and can't get out."

"Oh, that is wrong," said Ona, sadly. "We must go and rescue her."

"I'd like to know why?" said Bossu in dismay; "She is always mean to us."

"But don't you see, we have to return good for evil," replied the girl. "Christians must not hate anyone nor seek revenge."

Going to the hollow, she pulled Bowiss out and in return for the kindness made the witch promise not to injure her little friend.

This episode had the effect of ameliorating further persecution, and from that time on Ona was enabled to go about and preach her doctrine with little molestation. As a matter of fact, the few remaining Christians were almost lost sight of in the terrible internecine struggle that was in progress, with its attendant evils of famine and pest-

ilence. The battle for existence and self-preservation had become too acute to allow anyone to interest himself greatly in the persecution of any particular sect.

And so it passed into a tradition that the buffalo raiser's daughter was the kindest, friendliest and most extraordinary person that ever sojourned in the Place of Fishes.

While spreading her faith among the poor and lowly and during her missions of charity and mercy she learned that all the Christians whom she had left on the Plain of Arris, including her father, St. Ojoban and Geroth, had been slaughtered by the outrageous and inhuman orders of King Razak. She subsequently heard of the death of Queen Liliah and of the murder of Neckko the Counsellor; but though she had faith that Donato was still living, she could get no news concerning him. Her mind was continually filled with thoughts and fancies of her noble prince; when to her great elation she heard a rumor that a man answering to the description of the Master of the Horse had been seen not far to the north, looking for a maiden whom he claimed had been driven from Terrazan on the back of a wild bison.

Henceforward a two-fold ambition dominated her whole career: a desire to spread the doctrine

of Christianity to other and wider fields and a determination to meet her devoted friend. Without delay she prepared for the work in hand and a few days later secretly left the Place of Fishes.

Chapter XIII

Darkness overtook Donato before he could catch sight of the fleeing buffaloes and he was compelled to camp for the night on the prairie. He noted the location of the stars, tethered his horse and rolling himself up in his blanket was soon sound asleep.

Shortly afterwards three horsemen coming up on their way to Terrazan espied the charger. Drawing near, they recognized it as one belonging to the erstwhile Master of the Horse and formulated a plan to steal it.

"His sweetheart is in good hands," said the leader of the trio; "now if we can get hold of his horse, the fool will never be able to find her."

"Why did he espouse the cause of the Christians, I wonder?" asked the second. "He had everything to lose thereby and nothing to gain."

"There is something very strange about their religion," answered the third. "When one becomes converted to it he is changed completely, the transformation often amounting to insanity. It is impossible to tell what the victims may do. Quite likely if Donato should awaken and find us leading his horse away, he would praise his God

and offer no resistance. I have seen Christians abused and reviled in the most shameful manner and absolutely refuse to retaliate, although healthy, robust and powerful men."

"It is just as well not to arouse him," whispered the leader. "We are three to one, but I've seen him handle four with ease."

Cautiously advancing, the brigands unhitched the animal, then putting spurs to their mounts were soon out of reach with their trophy.

Donato was awakened by the clatter of the hoofs and aroused himself to find with dismay that he had lost his charger. Thenceforth he had to travel on foot, but resolved to continue his pursuit regardless of the misfortune.

The next day he passed some buffaloes quietly grazing not far from the edge of a forest; but though he diligently surveyed the landscape as far as his eyes would reach nowhere could he observe one carrying any object upon its back.

At an adjoining village he inquired of a party of hunters if they had noticed a maiden riding a buffalo, while out in their search for game.

They answered in the negative but told him that the neighboring herd had divided late the day before, some of the animals going in a more northerly direction, and perhaps he would find her there.

Changing his course Donato eagerly trailed along after the straggling bisons, wandering hither and thither, and continuing his quest until it lapsed into weeks and then into months. Nowhere could he find anyone who had ever seen Ona or who had even so much as heard of her escape. Despairingly he roamed from one tribe and settlement to another in the hopes that eventually he would find some clue to reward his efforts.

At one village an old man with whom he lodged over night told him that he had heard of Na-na Bo-sho. That he was the one who had made the Niagara Falls and the Pictured Rocks and the Great Lakes and all the islands in them.

"You are mistaken about that," said Donato. "God made all those things, but Na-na Bo-sho was his prophet and performed many minor miracles."

"Oh, I also know of the Great Spirit of whom you speak. He is first and above all, to be sure," replied the old man. "But he conferred upon Na-na Bo-sho the power to do anything he willed here upon the earth. He gave him power to overcome buffaloes by simply raising his hand. He told him to cure the sick and to make the blind see. All these things Na-na Bo-sho could do. He was even master over the rain, wind and sun."

As a proof of Na-na Bo-sho's super-natural

abilities, the old man related several stories. One was to the effect that as the Wonder-Worker was one day out in search of food, he came to a patch of a certain kind of sea weed that he greatly relished. He ate sumptuously and lay down to rest. He slept for a long time, until the water by its gradual movement, had nearly submerged him, and awoke just in time to save himself from a watery grave. He was highly displeased by this action of the water, and, rising to his full height, extended his hands over the lake and said:

"Hereafter that you may fool no one else in this manner, you will become smaller and smaller until you are as a draught of water in the palm of my hand."

"Since that time the water in the Great Lakes has slowly receded," assured the old man.

The story teller also accredited Na-na Bo-sho with having created the white fish. He had done this, he said, by catching a deer and throwing its brains upon the water.

"That is why the white fish is so clean and tastes so good. Besides being a great delicacy, it is a fine brain food," he concluded.

Donato was amused and astounded by these tales, but he heard many others, even more extravagant, as he traveled about.

Meanwhile the two factions of the Mound People, now locked together in a death grapple, were being destroyed by slow attrition; dissenting tribes encroached more and more upon their domains; an unusually cold planting season hindered what little agriculture might have been carried on; and gaunt famine stalked abroad in the land.

While these calamities were rapidly devastating and depopulating the continent, Donato, whose thoughts were only of Ona, in his reckless meanderings, chanced to pass the Place of Fishes. As he neared the outskirts of the village he accidentally stumbled over a pile of broken amulets. Picking up one of the fragments he at once recognized it as a part of a butterfly emblem.

"There must be Christians in this vicinity," he mused. "The plains where the buffaloes passed are visible from where I stand. Perhaps I will find some trace of her here."

While thus soliloquizing he observed a tiny man at his side.

"Hello!" said Donato; "Whence came all these charm stones, my good little fellow—can you tell me?"

The homuncule looked up smilingly. "Do you know to what clan they belong?" he asked.

"They are the insignia of the Christians," replied Donato.

The promptness with which he answered made Bossu bold to respond:

"Aye, aye, sire, you are quite right. They belong to the Christians—the only people who understand the true meaning and significance of life and death—who can give the only satisfying answer to the questions: 'Why are we here? and Whither are we going?' Are you not one of them, Sire?"

"I am proud to say that I am, and I always carry one of these emblems upon my person wherever I go. I judge by the quantity here demolished that persecutions have been taking place."

Bossu pulled one of the amulets from beneath his garment and pressing it to his lips held it in admiration before his eyes.

"Thank God, I have found rest and consolation in the blessed faith which these emblems represent. Those you see on the ground were made for a Christian girl who lived in our village. Her mistress, Bowiss, fearing their potency, broke them up and threw them away. But I paid her well for the sacrilege. Ha, ha ha!" laughed Bossu, as he recalled Bowiss' predicament in the hollow. "That was a good trick! That was a dandy scheme!" he repeated over and over, clasping his hands to his sides and dancing around on one foot and then on the other.

Donato was filled with interest by this narrative but paid no attention to the dwarf's merriment.

"Who was the girl you speak of?" he asked ardently, taking hold of Bossu's arm and gripping it tightly in his excitement.

The dwarf scowled in pain, tried to release himself from Donato's grasp, and drew back in fear.

"I beg your pardon," said the prince; "I didn't mean to hurt you, only I am anxious to know the name of the girl."

The sincerity of Donato's tone caused Bossu to again draw near.

"Who she is, sire, I cannot tell you, unless mayhap an angel dropped from heaven. Always ready to help the needy; always willing to visit and comfort the sick; always performing some act of kindness—a gentler creature never existed. Truly she is the most beautiful and wonderful person I have ever known. I fear the world will never see her like again."

"And what has become of her? Where is she now?" demanded Donato.

"She left for the north six days ago, to search for King Razak's son, whom she said she was divinely commissioned to convert to Christianity."

"Is her name Ona?"

"Yes, that is her right name, but Bowiss always called her Onus. She said she was the only daughter of a buffalo raiser by the name of Rabinka who was slaughtered in a holocaust on the Plain of Arris. She herself managed to escape the massacre through the heroic actions of a servant who magnanimously placed her upon the back of a fleeing buffalo, at the peril of his life. I heard the story from her own lips several times, and I could sit and listen to her talk for hours and hours and never get tired."

"May God shower blessings upon you for your information," replied Donato. "Be true to the faith of your friend and benefactress. For months I have been searching for this girl, without avail. This is the first intimation I have had of her whereabouts, thanks to the impulse that prompted me to visit this spot today. Take this as a token of gratitude from Donato, the son of King Razak."

So saying, he handed Bossu a box containing stones and treasure of great worth, and disappeared in the forest.

Chapter XIV

Thinking Donato was somewhere in the north, Ona had made her way toward the Great Lake region. Strange tribes roamed the forests; villages were few and far between and progress slow and tedious. But wherever she stopped the natives listened attentively to her story and treated her with great kindness. In many ways they assisted in her search, providing her with food and shelter and often-times with escorts. Although she learned that Donato had frequently been seen traveling through the country, she met no one who could tell her where he might be found.

Years elapsed and in her journeying she one day had occasion to relate some of the Bible stories to a party of hunters whom she encountered coming from the west.

After listening, they said: "We have heard all these things before. A great man, called Na-na Bo-sho, who could cross rivers by walking on the water; produce stormy or pleasant weather at will; bend trees by the pressure of his fingers; or level hills by merely breathing upon them, once lived amongst us. He performed many miracles

and told us of the love and watchfulness of the Great Spirit for all his earthly children. When he left us he promised to return, but though he went away a long time ago we have never seen him since. Can you tell us whither he has gone?"

"The real name of the one you refer to was St. Ojoban," replied Ona. "He went to Terrazan to preach the gospel, and was there persecuted and martyred. Had the Mound People accepted his message their achievements could never have been surpassed."

"It was impossible for them to kill him," replied the hunters. "Both he and the One who sent him were masters over life and death. We know we shall find him, if we continue in our search. The Great Spirit gave us this man to teach us how to live and die; and surely he has not taken him away. We are on our way to Manitouwaning, the Spirit Island, and have traveled since the cold days of the Moon of the Spirit. Come with us, Little Sister, for you are a follower of the great Na-na Bo-sho and we will hearken to your teachings."

For reasons of safety and guidance in an unknown region Ona gladly joined the expedition and traveled in the company of the hunters to the lake country, teaching and instructing many of the people with whom she came in contact. At

every opportunity she inquired for Donato, uncertain rumors of his presence often carrying her far afield.

At times she would stop in thickets and groves and call his name aloud; frequently she would shout it from the top of projecting pinnacles and cliffs. Receiving no response to her outcries, she wearily continued her rambles, an irresistible power tugging at her heartstrings and drawing her on.

At one point on the shore of Lake Michigan the party encountered an industrious tribe that had come from the mountains of the west, having been driven hither by the incursions of their foes. Ona had seen these people before, at the time she lived upon her father's estate. They were in fact the kinsmen of Geroth and were noted for their strength, endurance and agreeable disposition. Some of them still lived in caves and made underground houses, a favorable style of abode before their migration.

With indefatigable zeal the buffalo raiser's daughter entered upon her Christian work amongst them and converted a large number. Owing to her efforts, this tribe, known as the Underground Indians, for centuries afterwards maintained a semblance of Christian civilization and to the last were a peaceful, agricultural peo-

ple, absolutely refusing to engage in any quarrels or strife with their neighbors.

The chief of the Underground tribe one afternoon told Ona and her companions that a semi-deity once lived in a section of the country through which they had passed. He was subject to all human emotions and sensations, the chief assured them, and in addition had control over the works of nature. At times he gave himself up to capricious and fantastic feats. He was accredited with the ability to assume any shape or form he willed, and had the power to overcome evil spirits.

"What was the name of this wonderful person?" inquired Ona.

"Na-na Bo-sho," replied the chief; "he could converse with all the animals of the forest and none of them ever injured or molested him."

Then the chief related to them the story of how Na-na Bo-sho had adopted two wolves as his children and lived with them in a cave. One wintry day while on a hunting tour he chased a deer to a large lake which was inhabited by evil manitous. The wolves followed the deer out upon the ice but broke through and were devoured by the demons. For weeks Na-na Bo-sho walked along the lake shore day and night, mourning for the loss of his adopted children. At last when

warm weather came, a loon noticed his lamentations and asked him why he was weeping.

"My faithful children, the wolves, have been devoured by the evil spirits of the lake," he replied. "If I could only lay my hands upon the manitous I would strangle them."

"Then," said the loon, "follow my instructions and I will enable you to overcome the miscreants. Go to the place over yonder, where the demons come out every morning and sun themselves on the sand, and when I give my cry, assume the form of a stump and wait."

Na-na Bo-sho proceeded to the spot indicated and as soon as he heard the loon's cry, converted himself into a pine stump.

The demons coming up out of the water were at once attracted by the strange object and the leader, a hideous monster with long tail and horns, sent an enormous snake after Na-na Bo-sho to destroy him. The snake coiled himself around the stump and squeezed with all its power, but there being no outcry, it went back to its chief and reported that the object was nothing but a dead tree stub.

But the chief of the demons was suspicious and dissatisfied with the report, so he sent a huge grizzly bear to attack the stump. The bear hugged, bit and clawed it, but with no better suc-

cess, and it in turn returned to its master to vouchsafe for the truth of what the snake had said.

Being satisfied with the bear's story, the king of the demons and his assistants sprawled themselves out on the warm sand and soon fell asleep.

Then the loon who was on the watch gave another piercing cry and flew over Na-na Bo-sho's head; whereupon the latter seized his bow and arrow and shot at the demons, severely wounding the leader, but before he could adjust a second arrow to his string, they sprang up in terrible anger and caused the waters of the lake to rise and pursue the man with a great tidal wave.

As the water rose about him, Na-na Bo-sho ran up the slope of an adjacent mountain; then he fled to the highest peak; and then climbed the tallest tree. Still the flood kept gaining, inch by inch. At last, in despair, he prayed to his father, the Great Spirit, to make the tree grow, and the Great Spirit hearkened to the voice of his child and made the tree grow until the water was quiescent.

Gazing around him, Na-na Bo-sho saw many animals swimming about. Calling to them he said:

"My Brothers, you see the Great Spirit has

answered my prayer and the water has ceased to rise, but unless I can obtain some earth from which to make land we shall yet be drowned. I must call on you for assistance."

The animals, acknowledging Na-na Bo-sho as their master, crowded around him and agreed to do whatever he wished. So he selected an otter to go down to the bottom of the sea to get some earth; but the otter did not prove a clever enough swimmer to accomplish the feat, and Na-na Bo-sho had to send a muskrat. After a long and painful absence, the muskrat arose to the surface and turned over on its back exhausted. Then Na-na Bo-sho as a last resort sent a beaver, and in a little while the beaver returned with a small quantity of earth in one of its paws. The demigod took the particle of earth, rubbed it in his hand and exposed it to the sun until it was dry, then blew his breath upon it and scattered it over the water where it grew into islands and continents.

After this feat was accomplished the third and last cry of the loon echoed loudly over hill and dale, and the Wonder-Worker came down from the tree and created a pair of each of the animals that had been lost in the flood and thus repopulated the forests.

The chief of the Underground tribe said he

could relate many other stories regarding the great man, but the hunters, anxious to reach their destination, were loath to tarry.

Bidding their friends goodbye and pressing forward, they passed frowning headlands, jagged coasts and land-locked bays, and finally, after many experiences and hardships, reached a beautiful rock-girt island, called "The Turtle's Back," where the three largest lakes form their juncture. Ona was welcomed by the members of the little tribe that inhabited the island and cordially invited to make her home amongst them.

As each adventure she had had thus far but added to her disappointment, she decided that further efforts to locate Donato would be fruitless and so accepted the offer of the islanders. The hunters reluctantly took leave of their beloved companion and passed on towards the east, promising to spread the story of the Redeemer and to do what they could to obtain information concerning her friend.

The Turtle's Back where Ona located was a favorite stopping place for travelers; and so it happened that she met many persons from remote parts of the country.

Inhabitants of the region bordering upon the Father of Waters frequently reached the island by a favored route that led through an enchant-

ing chain of rivers, lakes and portages, and whenever they did so, invariably spread stories of a great and wonderful man who had sojourned in their land, where he raised the dead to life, condemned wrongdoers, taught love and reverence for the Great Spirit and performed numerous spectacular feats.

In time the stories credited him with restoring vegetation after it had been destroyed by a drought; with the crossing of lakes by walking upon their beds under the water; with the creation of all the waterfalls, bad lands, rocks and rivers, and even of the mighty mountain ranges of the country.

As they proceeded, the tellers of these tales frequently gave them a humorous quirk or aspect, as incidents were introduced which they could not explain nor comprehend. Their imaginations sufficed to add many grotesque and impossible episodes.

To her consternation, one of her visitors related to her in all seriousness how the renowned prophet, who was known as Na-na Bo-sho, had created the island upon which she was living. Coming to the head of the lake, he said, and being unable to cross it, the magician had picked up huge rocks and boulders along the shore from which he constructed a bridge across the nar-

rows. After he had crossed over, a tornado swept by and demolished the bridge, leaving only a small section of it sticking out of the water—and this produced the island. In proof of his contention, the narrator pointed to its sea-walls, cliffs and rocky formation.

Another caller told her that Na-na Bo-sho on one of his long journeys came to a beautiful sheet of water upon whose surface were countless wild fowls. He was very hungry, having been without food for several days. Although a demi-god he was subject to the pangs of cold and hunger which he was obliged to overcome by the natural prowess of a skilled and experienced hunter. As soon as he saw the fowls he bethought himself of a clever ruse to ensnare them. Walking back into the woods a short distance, he constructed a birch bark wigwam and a reed flute. Then he returned to the shore and began to blow on the flute to attract the attention of the water fowls. When they looked toward him, he told them that he had just returned from a far-off country where all the people were expert musicians and if they would come with him to his wigwam he would entertain them with some of the airs he had heard. Curious and delighted, the entire flock waddled noisily after him to his wigwam.

After they had all entered, Na-na Bo-sho seated himself at the entrance and began playing spirited

selections upon the flute. Every now and then, without stopping the music, he would reach slyly behind his back and wring the neck of one of his guests. Very soon the fluttering of some of the expiring creatures aroused those that were listening, entranced, to the strains of the flute, and realizing that they had been decoyed and duped, they suddenly set up a loud cackle and rushed for the lake. The last to make their exit were the loon and the mud-hen. Na-na Bo-sho in his efforts to capture the pair put a foot upon the back of each and crushed them flat. In so doing, however, he slipped and fell and the loon and mud-hen both escaped, but ever since the event their legs have stuck out straight behind.

Ona also heard the story of "kinnikinik," the bark of the willow tree, which the Indians dried and mixed with their tobacco. The red color of the bark was made so by Na-na Bo-sho's blood, the story-tellers informed her, which was spattered over the willow trees when he accidentally cut himself one day in the forest.

"That is why 'kinnikinik' is good to smoke," they said. "It is a cherished article and has power to protect us from all harm."

Na-na Bo-sho, it was said, told the people that his father, the Great Spirit, would gather them all after death in a beautiful place he had pre-

pared for them, where they could laugh and shout, and hunt and play, and be happy forever and ever. It was a difficult place to reach, he said —the road was long and narrow; but the souls of those who were brave, faithful and honest here on earth would surely find it after they had passed to the great beyond.

All these narratives, though grossly exaggerated, Ona recognized as being based upon the words, works and miracles of St. Ojoban. In vain did she strive to make the proper corrections. She was only a woman and the influence of the gentler sex insofar as leadership in the councils and medicine lodges was concerned had practically disappeared with the ravages of war and famine.

Some of her informants insisted that their friends had seen and heard these things with their very eyes and ears and therefore could not be mistaken. Apparently many essentials of the revelations had escaped them; but the great underlying truths of a universal Creator; the divine power to perform miracles; an eternal life after death; and reward in the future for steadfastness, virtue and honor were firmly implanted and destined to live for all time.

Chapter XV

Donato in his search for Ona, became like her, a wanderer through the trackless wilderness. Journeying whitherwards the caprices of fate impelled him, he passed the mighty falls of Niagara, before which he stood for hours, fascinated by the voice of the water. It seemed to direct him toward the land of the setting sun; so he entered the country to the north of the chain of Great Lakes and traveled westward.

In this region he met a band of stalwart warriors—"Men of the Big Salt Water," they styled themselves—because their parents had crossed the ocean in an open boat. They informed Donato that a renowned philosopher, seer and prophet, who could heal the sick and forestall death, had accompanied their people to this continent. In a shipwreck he had calmed the sea and saved their lives, and with his bare hands had captured fishes for food, without the aid of nets or hooks or other artifices. After disembarking, he had gone to the interior of the country, contrary to the admonition of his friends, to preach the gospel, living in the meantime on wild fruits and honey. They



sought tidings concerning him and asked Donato if he had heard of such a one.

"Indeed, I knew him well," answered the prince. "He was killed by the people he went to save. Did you not know that he and his followers were proscribed and put to death near Terrazan?"

"We heard that the Christians had been persecuted and killed, but of course Na-na Bo-sho had nothing to fear—he was immune to sickness, pain and death. He must be somewhere near his chosen field of labor."

"You will not find him in the flesh," replied Donato. "The kingdom is not of this world but of the one to come. We are all subject to the same laws of nature here on earth—each one must succumb sooner or later to the ravages of disease and death. St. Ojoban fulfilled his mission and destiny and is now with his Creator in paradise."

So positive were the Men of the Big Salt Water that the apostle could not be dead, however, that they refused to believe Donato's story and were even vexed by his assertions. They left him, declaring that they would travel until they found the apostle.

In the succeeding years the famine drove people to far places in search of food. Continuing his route westward, Donato was overtaken by an unusually cold and severe winter which compelled

him to seek refuge in the swamps and dense forests of the interior. He came upon numerous half-famished animals and large packs of enormous wolves that roamed the forests, watching for an opportunity to spring upon their unsuspecting victims and drag them down.

Finding no inhabitants in that vast region, aside from the wild creatures of the woods, the adventurer erected a rude abode from poles and bark, near a small lake, and resolved to await the advent of spring before proceeding further.

The snow fell to a prodigious depth; the cold became almost unbearable; and, had Donato not been a man of iron constitution, it would not have been possible for him to survive, alone, in his wigwam. But even in this crisis no word of complaint escaped his lips. The hope of ultimately being able to find Ona, buoyed him up, and he knelt and thanked God daily for His divine grace and mercy.

Miraculously directed by Providence, which had thus far protected him from the war and pestilence, Donato secured sufficient sustenance from the carcass of a moose that perished in the neighborhood to keep himself alive. While on a tour of inspection in the vicinity, he discovered a flint ledge, from which he managed to detach several lumps, to be chipped into arrow and spear heads. These he fashioned and shaped as he willed, by

heating and flaking with drops of cold water; he also chipped a number by the quick, hard pressure of a deer bone, held between the thumb and index finger. With the arrows and spears he kept his table supplied with small game and fish.

The fur bearing animals he skinned with a copper knife which had been hardened by embedding and baking in clay, saturated with a distillation of roots and herbs. The hides were dressed with a large scraping stick and furnished covering, clothing and bedding.

The winter dragged on apace, with frequent storms so violent and severe it seemed as though every living thing would be forced to succumb. But happily the Moon of the Disappearing Snow witnessed a protracted thaw that reduced the fastnesses of ice and frost and caused torrents of water to gush from every hillside. The crisis was passed and gradually the smiling sun set its face toward the summer solstice. Soon the cawing of crows and the honking of geese presaged the approach of warm weather, and ere long the Moon of the Planting Season arrived, bringing with it fresh-budding trees and flowers; the songs of birds; and the music of rippling rills and cataracts; converting the erstwhile wilderness into a vast bower of delightful sounds and color.

Pigeons began to fly northwards in large numbers, and furnished an abundance of food as providential as manna sent from heaven. The famine was at an end and the voices of nature sang their praises to the Creator in loud acclaim.

To Donato these varying rhapsodies were but whisperings and tidings from Ona. In his dreams he constantly heard her voice calling him westward, and scarcely had the ground become dry, than he closed his wigwam and resumed his journey.

Again nearing the Great Lakes, he came upon a party of hunters from the country of the Father of Waters, who invited him to a seat in their lodge.

The Prince of Terrazan had adopted an attire consisting of buckskin hunting shirt, leggins, moccasins and a head-gear of eagle feathers, and no one mistrusted his identity. A single butterfly gorget worn about his neck underneath his hunting garment revealed the fact that he was a Christian.

In the evening, as the adventurers were relating their experiences before a roaring camp fire, one of the hunters caught a glimpse of the pendant through Donato's open shirt bosom and touching him gently on the shoulder said:

"Brother, I also wear the Christian emblem. If

you are a follower of the great apostle, you are doubly welcome in our lodge."

"I have carried it ever since the cruel massacre on the Plain of Arris," replied Donato. "Then and there I vowed never to give it up."

"Did you know Na-na Bo-sho, the Man of Wonders?" asked the hunter.

"Yes, I was with him in the Cave of Phantoms before his capture."

At this statement the others drew closer and listened breathlessly.

"We lately met a woman," said the hunter, "who also knew the Wonder-Worker and who declared that he had perished in the massacre of which you speak. We are certain that she was mistaken, for how can a man die who has power to bring others back to life? Have you any positive knowledge of what happened to him?"

"The woman informed you correctly. St. Ojoban died as becomes a true Christian martyr and prophet—exhorting his people to be firm in the faith and zealous for the glory of God."

"But unless you actually saw him expire we cannot believe your story."

"Even the apostle himself doubted," replied Donato; "therefore others are not to be censured

for incredulity. He was skeptical regarding the Resurrection of the Redeemer until he saw the print of the nails in his Savior's hand and thrust his finger into his side. Although I did not personally see him die, that St. Ojoban is no longer on earth, is certain. He has arisen unto greater glory. Let us take unto ourselves the words of his oft-repeated text: 'Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed'."

"We are confident that he is still alive," insisted the hunter. "It would be impossible to destroy him. Neither yourself, nor the woman who escaped from the field on the back of a bison—"

At these words Donato sprang to his feet. He was oblivious to every argument put forth by the hunter. He heard but the one remark—all others paled into insignificance.

"Escaped from the field on the back of a bison!" he repeated, excitedly. "When did you meet the woman, and where is she now?"

"She traveled with us from the lower end of the long lake to the west and left us at the island known as The Turtle's Back."

"I have been looking for her for years and God has directed me hither to receive this gladsome news. I must hasten to the island before she departs."

"Are you Donato, the Prince of Terrazan?"

"Yes, the son of King Razak."

"Ona will be delighted beyond measure," assured the hunters. "She has sought you far and wide and fears you have been killed."

Donato, elated by what he had heard, resolved to set out immediately to find the one, who, up to this time, had unintentionally escaped him with the elusiveness of a will-o'-the-wisp.

Leaving the camp that night, he proceeded with all haste toward The Turtle's Back. So intent was he in his quest that he traveled day and night, scarcely taking the time to eat or sleep.

After a journey of several days' duration, including a long and dangerous canoe trip over rough water, he came in sight of the island. Viewing its attractive outline, with joyous emotions he anticipated his meeting with Ona and the end of his weary wanderings.

As he approached the village, a fleet of canoes passed by, and the occupants of the boat nearest to him, shouted:

"Keep away from the island! It is infested with small pox and many of the inhabitants have already perished!"

Donato was shocked and filled with anxiety by

this information; but he was not to be balked by fear of an epidemic. If Ona could only escape the plague, he was willing to brave any danger. Instead of slackening his speed, therefore, or turning around, he gripped his paddle tighter and forced his canone forward with redoubled efforts.

Those in the other boat, surprised at his rashness after their friendly warning, shook their heads doubtfully and hastened on their way.

In a few moments Donato had gained the beach. The streets of the little village were deserted and a silence as of death enveloped the entire island.

With difficulty he obtained the information from an aged couple, who were reluctant to admit him to their wigwam, that the woman he was seeking was stricken with the dread malady and lay hovering between life and death in a tepee at the far end of the village. He was told how she had braved every danger of infection in order to minister to the wants of the unfortunate; how, unmindful of her own safety, she had fearlessly entered the abodes of the sick and ailing in her endeavors to alleviate their suffering and distress; until, weakened by overwork and worry, she fell an easy prey to the disease. To prevent exposing others she had voluntarily withdrawn to an abandoned and out-of-the-way hovel.

Donato was plainly heart-broken by this sad recital.

"How like her," he reflected; "always thinking of someone else first—always living for others. Surely Bossu was right when he said she was an angel dropped from heaven."

Rousing himself from his lethargy, he said to the aged couple:

"Hurry and show me where she is that I may go to her at once!"

The hut was pointed out to him and he lost no time in tracing his footsteps thither. On the way he continually reproached himself for having been slow and dilatory in his search.

"Why didn't I come sooner?" "Why was I so awkward and stupid?" "God spare her until I can reach her side!" he repeated over and over, as he hurried along the street. His thoughts were so preoccupied with Ona that he scarcely knew where he was treading.

It seemed an age before he came to the desolate hovel. When at last he reached it, he opened the door softly and entered. Staring wildly about him in the half-darkness, he discerned a little heap of humanity on a bed of straw in one corner of the single room of the hut.

Sensing his presence, Ona raised her head and looked at the intruder.

Standing in the light that flooded through the open door, Donato's form and figure were plainly visible and Ona uttered a cry of joy as she recognized her lover. Her first impulse was to extend her arms to welcome him to her bosom; but realizing her terrible condition and the awful danger to which he would be exposed, she sorrowfully shook her head, and raised her hand in protest when she saw him advance toward her.

"Do not venture nearer!" she cried. "Oh, why have you entered this dreadful place?"

A feeling of intense agony filled her soul and her voice quivered with emotion as she sought to repel the one for whom her heart had so long been yearning.

Through the dimness of the room Donato could distinguish with certainty only Ona's hand waving him away. He beheld upon it the ravages of the disease and a nightmare of blackness blinded his eyes, as, for a moment, he hesitated, dumfounded and cast down.

But the intrepid prince, at the brink of the realization of his supreme happiness, did not propose to turn back. His heart had too long been torn by the vagaries of fate to again be thwarted.

No power on earth, short of death itself, could have prevented him longer from going to the one he loved. After the initial surprise and shock, he rushed to Ona's side with outstretched arms to clasp her to his breast.

The maiden, perceiving the recklessness of his intentions, turned her head, terrified, and buried it beneath the covers.

"Ona! Ona!" cried Donato, as he knelt beside her. "Look up! Do not turn away! Ever since the destruction of Terrazan I have been roaming the continent to find you. It matters not that you have been stricken by this plague. Malignant as it is, it holds no terrors for me now. I would rather die a thousand deaths than to ever think of giving you up."

His utter disregard for the venomous disease that had attacked her and his total abandonment to whatever fate might be in store for him rather than to leave her side, caused Ona as never before to realize the great love of Donato.

Uncovering her head, she looked tearfully into his eyes.

To his unspeakable joy, her face revealed no trace of the disease. Her features possessed their usual charm and sweetness, accentuated and heightened by a supreme lustre that he had never

seen before. Gently drawing her head against his shoulder, he pressed his lips to hers.

In the union of these two great souls, the scourge was powerless to proceed. As if by magic the pits and scars left Ona's body and suddenly her face beamed with a radiant smile.

"Oh, look!" she said, straightening herself up; "St. Ojoban has been here—he just this moment passed through the door!"

Donato rushed out and saw the apostle walking toward the lake. He called his name but there was no response, and as he gazed the apparition disappeared from view.



Enchanted with the scenery and beauty of the island, Donato and Ona determined to roam no farther. Becoming acclimated to the country, they settled down, reared a family and induced other travelers to locate amongst them. Both reached an advanced age, but neither made any

further attempt to convince the people that Na-na Bo-sho was no more.

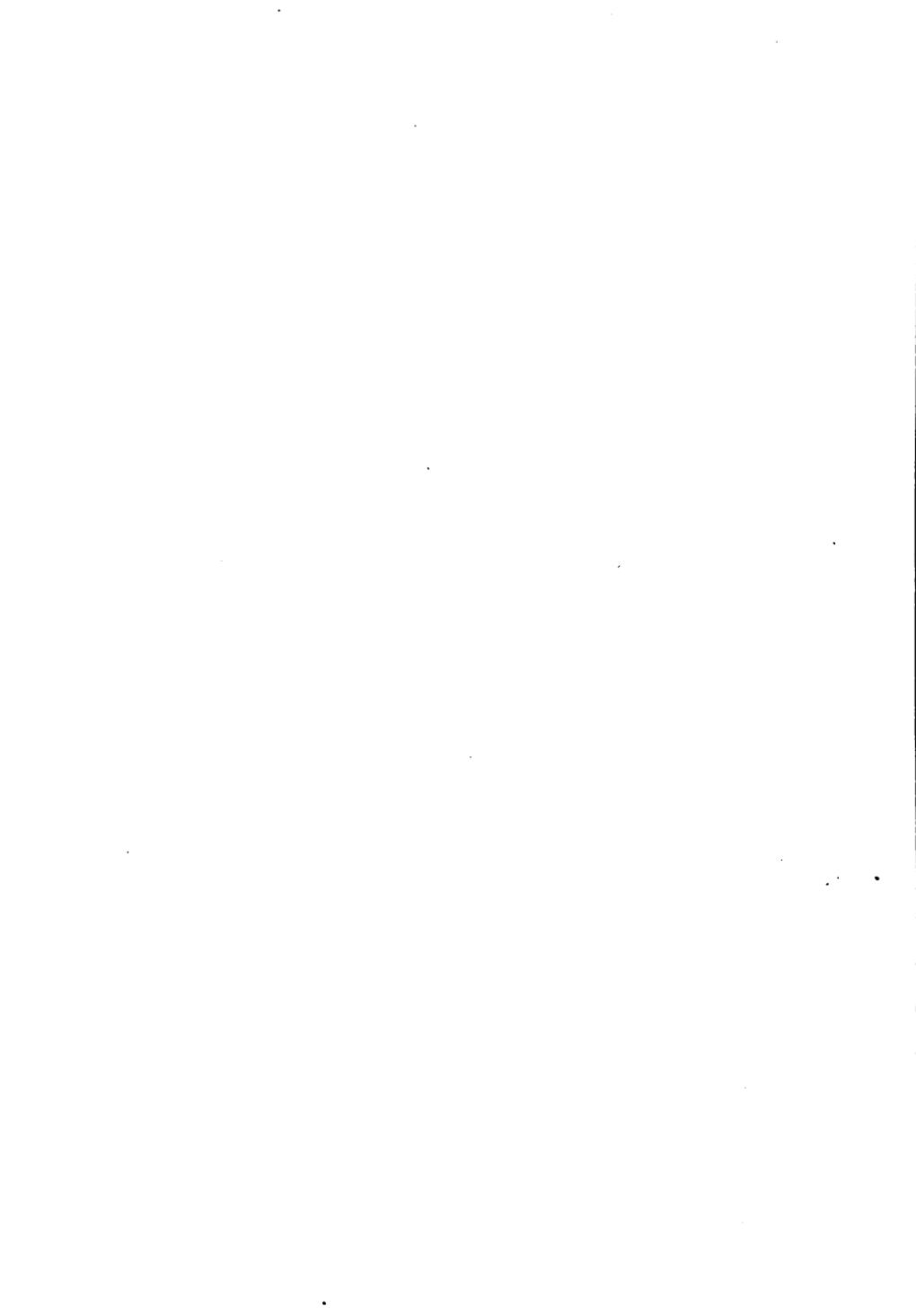
Their descendants believe that the great prophet still lives, and though he cannot be seen, continues to roam the old familiar places, while he performs his miracles and wonders and watches over his beloved children as in the days of yore.

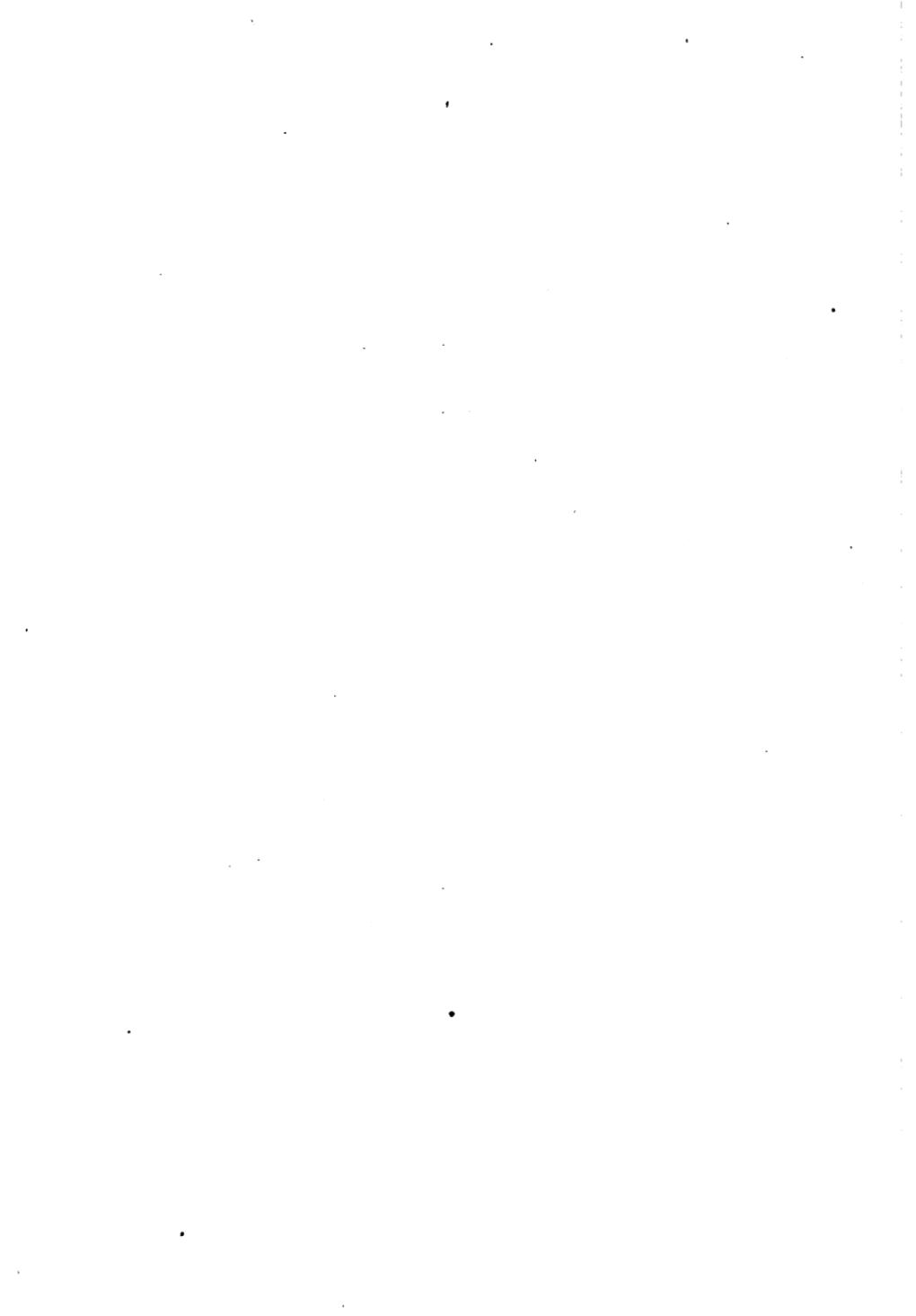
F I N I S

St. Paul to the Romans;

***"Thy faith is spoken of throughout the
whole world."***







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